Happy and you know it? A cultural exploration of people's experiences and perceptions of happiness

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Abstract

Happiness, rather than being a private, internal and subjective experience, is shaped, interpreted and articulated via culturally specific ways of thinking, being and acting. When producing accounts of happiness, people commonly situate themselves within a range of dominant discourses; it is in doing so that a shared sense of what happiness 'is' is created. This empirical study – through the analysis of the accounts of the experiences and perceptions of happiness of twenty-six British adults – explores the way in which discourses are used in this way, and furthermore, the way in which such an understanding of the use of discourse can assist in interrogating some of the determinants of happiness that are championed by proponents of social scientific work on the measurement of happiness.

People position themselves in a range of dominant discourses. One set characterises happiness as asocial, that is, as something biological, 'natural' or resistant to wider social changes across time and space. Another set of discourses characterise happiness as being located within a complex normative framework in which there exists cultural guidelines on the way in which happiness ought to be displayed and experienced. The display of an 'appropriate' level of happiness entails a negotiation of two opposing norms that prescribe the undesirability of both persistent happiness and persistent unhappiness. Therapeutic discourse, which is one of the most widely used discourses in the production of accounts of happiness, characterises it as something individualised, internal and self-orientated. Self-knowledge and self-care are regarded here as two of the most important routes to happiness. Interpersonal relationships, financial situation and working life – as well as being three of the most ‘important’ determinants of happiness postulated by the aforementioned scholars of the measurement of happiness – are made sense of via all of these discourses. It
is in this way that the role that each of these factors play in the experience of happiness may not be as linear or as straightforward as economists postulate.
Acknowledgments

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Thanks also go to my sister and sister-in-law, Jenny and Emma Whiteman, for their support and for assisting me with the recruitment of interview respondents; my late grandmother, Rose Hyman, for further assistance with recruiting respondents, as well as for being so keenly interested in my academic endeavours; my mum, Sandra Hyman, and dad, Richard Hyman, for being wonderful, supportive and understanding parents throughout the process of my PhD as well as my life overall; and love to Gerard Harrison for being there for me, particularly in the most challenging latter stages of my work.
Statement of Originality

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so-assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

"The concept of happiness is such an indeterminate one that even though everyone wishes to attain happiness, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills." (Kant, 1785/1981:27)

It could be argued that the idea of happiness is ubiquitous in contemporary western societies such as Europe and North America; it features heavily in popular culture, advertising and mass media more broadly, and it is something that most people would feel is an inevitable goal that they strive to achieve in their lives. Many would feel that it is the pursuit of happiness that stands as the guiding principle of people’s lives, and which sits at the basis of human thought today. Indeed, as the American Declaration of Independence (1776) states, the rights of all men are “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Alexis de Tocqueville (1840/1988) said about the American people: “happiness is a quality which ever retreats before them without getting out of sight, and as it retreats it beckons them on to pursue. Every instant they think they will catch it, and each time it slips through their fingers.” (1840/1988:538). Indeed, such a precept continues to stand at the foundation of whole societies up until today; in North America and beyond. It is principles such as this that render happiness a necessary and indeed important avenue of academic investigation.

Although happiness is a ubiquitous aspiration, Kant’s words presented here may have some relevance in the contemporary world; happiness is far from straightforward, and many people may be unable to clearly articulate the specific source and nature of their happiness. On the other hand, it being such a major facet of popular culture and human existence in this way may nevertheless leave people well-placed to be able to produce accounts of the
ways in which they experience and perceive happiness. This thesis presents, alongside the results of an empirical study, a number of social scientific angles or perspectives on the topic, which together form a cultural framework within which its complexities, discourses and lived experiences are explored in detail.

**The study of happiness**

The last thirty years have seen a rapid proliferation of research into happiness and well-being in the social sciences. In particular, social indicators research has emphasised the importance of happiness measures at a national level, alongside more traditional economic or ‘objective’ measures like GDP-growth and per-capita income, for the monitoring of societal progress. They are increasingly being utilised as subjective social indicators, and can serve as a complement to the existing economic, or objective social indicators (such as GDP, unemployment rates and crime rates) that have traditionally been used by many national governments for this purpose. Much of this work – which mainly utilises measures of happiness derived from survey variables - has been undertaken within the disciplines of economics and psychology. Work has been undertaken in this area on uncovering the determinants of happiness, with a view that increased happiness (and thus an increase of the determinants of it) will lead to increased progress. Indeed, national governments have also recently acknowledged the importance of having such information with which societal progress can be monitored. In November 2010, it was announced by Prime Minister David Cameron that the UK’s subjective well-being is to be measured alongside its Gross Domestic Product (The Guardian 2010, Hawkes 2010). Respondents of the Office for National Statistics’ (ONS) Integrated Household Survey (which collects data from 200,000 individuals annually) will be asked questions on the topic from April 2011, and it is hoped that the data collected will play a key role in government policy-making.
Despite all of this, ideas of what 'happiness' actually means remain somewhat fluid, as the quote from Kant above suggests; some might say that it is an emotion, triggered by events or occurrences (as it is by some sociologists of emotion; see Turner & Stets 2005 and Kemper 1984), whilst others might argue that it is a longer-lasting 'state of mind' and part of one's identity and personhood. Thus, if there exists these two ideas about what happiness is, then the determinants of happiness highlighted by economists may not necessarily impact on how happy people feel through the direct causal links that they postulate. Rather, there may be a multitude of social and cultural processes that simultaneously come into play when a person feels and experiences happiness. Thus, happiness may be more complex a phenomenon than existing research has initially assumed. Those who do view happiness as a longer-lasting 'state of mind' or an aspect of identity may see the attainment of a fixed state of happiness to be the end-point of such a pursuit, whereby they would seek to be 'happy' people, whether or not this is achieved in practice. Simultaneously, however, people may experience happiness in response to an event as a shorter-term emotion, yet would not consider him- or herself as necessarily a happy personal overall.

The gap in existing knowledge

The study of happiness within sociology has remained a rather under-researched area, despite its place in classical sociology; indeed, happiness is implicit in Weber's work on the ways in which life was shaped by religious ethics and on the way people chose to live in order that otherworldly salvation was granted (Weber, 1904/2002). Similarly, Durkheim's work suggests that people are to seek happiness and well-being through a new moral order characterised by rituals and community (Durkheim, 1912/1961) and Marx's theory of alienation viewed workers in capitalist societies as being distinctly unhappy as a result of
alienation and an inability to realise their species-being (Marx and Engels, 1988). Nevertheless, few studies of happiness specifically exist as sociology as a discipline has traditionally preoccupied itself with pathologies such as pain, suffering and broad social problems. In addition, happiness does not appear to sit well within any particular subfield of sociology; its place within the sociology of emotions, whilst important (as will be explored in chapter 3) is also not a wholly appropriate one, as happiness is not necessarily just an emotion, but also an aspect of personhood. By the same token, it is not wholly welcome within the sociology of identity either, due to its emotional characteristics. However, slow progress is being made, with the establishment of the British Sociological Association Happiness Study Group (British Sociological Association, 2011) in late 2009; with a growing membership, happiness is starting to become considered a field of sociological inquiry in its own right.

Nevertheless, there remains a rather troubling and problematic divide, both within sociology itself and across the entire social sciences, between quantitative work on happiness that seeks to measure it (alongside related concepts such as quality of life and well-being) on a societal level at fixed points in time and more qualitative, culture-orientated work that is more identity and emotion-based and is more concerned with individuals' everyday experiences of happiness (most of which is still emerging; scholars are taking an increased interest in this area currently, but little – if anything - has been published on it as yet). There appears to be few points of convergence and little common ground between the two bodies of work. Thus, another - more implicit - aim of the thesis is to try and 'bridge' the gap between the two; how can the latter body of work - which this thesis does indeed fall into - be used to inform, complement or interrogate the former? How this will be attempted will be explained in the following section.
The current thesis

This thesis poses two research questions: how do people use discourse in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness in contemporary Britain? And how can some of the assumptions that underpin social scientific work on the measurement of happiness be interrogated through such an understanding of the use of discourse?

The term 'discourse' is used throughout the thesis to refer to the notion of it that Michel Foucault uses in his work. In a discussion of what discourse is, he states that "alongside everything a society can produce (alongside: that is to say, in a determinate relationship with) there is the formation and transformation of 'things said'." (Foucault, 1991:63). A discourse is made up of statements, and is based upon a set of rules that prescribe which speech acts are to have meaning. It is these rules that are the main focus of Foucault's notion of discourse, rather than the language that is used, or the psyches of the human subjects who carry out the speech acts (Foucault, 1991). These rules, Foucault argues, are specific to time periods and societies, and they determine a number of things, including what it is possible to say and to talk about (as well as what it is possible to say in particular domains), which utterances are likely to be remembered for long periods of history and which may be more quickly forgotten, and who is likely to have access to certain discourses (that is, do certain groups or classes have better access than others?) (Foucault, 1972). However, discourses are not necessarily fixed or static; they can change according to new utterances being added to them. Multiple discourses can also be employed simultaneously, depending upon what is being expressed through them. They are, furthermore, not things that are controlled by powerful beings; instead, "discoursing subjects form a part of the discursive field." (1991:58). They are not pre-existing spaces that subjects enter into, but
they are formations that subjects themselves create and change, when new utterances are added. Foucault also stresses that the study of discourse is not about seeking to understand their hidden or underlying meanings, but to understand their actual form and appearance, and the field or conditions in which they are used or deployed. Foucault also says that every time period is characterised by a number of dominant discourses, which people – or subjects – use, or situate themselves in, in order to make sense of their lives and the social world, to accord them with meaning and to understand ‘truths’. ‘Truth’ is created by discourse itself, according to what is said and is ‘sayable’ at each particular time in history (Foucault 1972, 1991). Indeed, happiness is one aspect of people’s lives that is understood through a range of dominant discourses. Rather than simply being a ‘private’, internal experience, happiness is something that is shaped, interpreted and articulated via culturally specific ways of thinking, being and acting (Jackson, 1999). Furthermore, it could even be argued that the way in which people talk about happiness, and the way in which they position themselves within discourses of it is “a means by which we participate in creating a shared sense” (1999:101) of what happiness is.

The thesis, then, offers – via an exploration of sociological literature and the collection and analysis of qualitative interview data – an examination of the ways in which people give accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness, and of how they use a range of dominant discourses in producing these. This examination then forms a sociological framework within which the assumptions and precepts that underpin social scientific work on the determinants of happiness can be interrogated. It is using these two questions in tandem in this way that allows for the disciplinary and substantive gap between the two ‘streams’ of happiness research to be bridged.
Chapter 2 of the thesis provides an overview of some of the social scientific work that has been undertaken on the measurement and determinants of happiness – much of which is known as the ‘economics of happiness’: “The economics of happiness [...] combines the techniques typically used by economists with those more commonly used by psychologists. It relies on surveys of the reported well-being of hundreds of thousands of individuals across countries and continents.” (Graham, 2005:41). It will set out the main assumptions and precepts that underpin the measures and determinants that are put forward. Chapter 3 will then address the first research question, by exploring some sociological literature that focuses upon the ways in which ‘therapeutic’ discourse – which may be one dominant cultural discourse that people use to produce their accounts of happiness - is used to make sense of the self and everyday life. It also explores a range of sociological and psychoanalytic approaches to the self more generally, as well as literature from the sociology of emotions, on the ways in which emotions can be understood to be shaped, experienced and interpreted through social and cultural processes. That chapter will then conclude by turning back to the second question and examining the ways in which the assumptions that underpin the existing work on happiness – set out in chapter 2 - could be interrogated or problematised through such an understanding of the relationship between happiness, discourse and culture. Chapter 4 then delineates the methodological elements of the study. It offers a consideration of this study's interpretive constructionist approach, and the way in which the research is primarily concerned with the meanings and ideas that people use to make sense of their experiences and perceptions of happiness. It outlines in some detail the process of data collection, whereby qualitative interviews were undertaken with twenty-six British adults whose conceptions of and reflections upon the idea of happiness were investigated. It considers the issue of reflexivity, both in terms of self-reflection and the epistemological assumptions that underpin the research.
Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 then present the data analysis from the qualitative interview data. Through this analysis, they firstly demonstrate how respondents all used dominant discourses in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness, and secondly, provide a springboard from which the precepts that underpin many of the studies undertaken within the economics of happiness can be interrogated through such an understanding of its relationship with discourse. Chapters 5 and 6 focus more generally upon respondents' accounts of their perceptions and their experiences of happiness respectively. Chapter 5 explores the ways in which people articulate what they think happiness is, and their positioning of themselves in a number of different discourses when doing so. Chapter 6 then goes on to examine people's utilisation of what is known as therapeutic discourse in producing their accounts (see chapter 3 for a detailed overview of this), and charts the way in which people may understand their experiences of happiness through key therapeutic cultural ideals, such as individualisation, internality and the self. It explores people's use of the ideas of 'work' on the self and self-knowledge (which are also central tenets of therapeutic discourse, or 'therapy culture') in making sense of their experiences of happiness and unhappiness.

Chapters 7 and 8 then move on to address the ways in which the determinants of happiness that have been highlighted and emphasised by economists can be interrogated within this framework of discourse and culture. Chapter 7 takes the factors of family relationships, friends and community, and explores respondents' accounts of their experiences of these, and their perceptions of the importance of them for a 'happy' life. Whilst they all emerged as highly important for almost all respondents, the chapter also acknowledges the way in which discourses around relationships may compete with the therapeutic discourse explored
in Chapter 6 in people’s accounts of happiness; in other words, its characterisation as individual and internal may be shown to be less straightforward than initially assumed. Chapter 8 then presents an interrogation of the determinants of ‘financial situation’ and ‘working life’. Like in Chapter 7, it explores people’s accounts of the happiness and unhappiness experienced in these areas of life, and their perceptions of their importance for happy life. Additionally, it considers social class as a factor that may compete with therapeutic discourse in these accounts: how might a middle class aesthetic be brought out in the articulation of perceptions of money’s diminished importance for happiness?

By presenting a culturally-informed framework within which happiness can be theorised then, this thesis seeks, firstly, to delineate the way in which accounts of happiness are produced through the use of particular dominant discourses (whether that be therapeutic discourse, or a range of others that may be shown to compete with this in people’s accounts), and secondly, to show how the tenets underpinning the existing work on the determinants and measurement of happiness can be interrogated through this understanding of the relationship between people’s experiences and perceptions of happiness and discourse.
Chapter 2  
The Foundations of the Economics of Happiness

How do people use discourse in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness in contemporary Britain? And how can some of the assumptions that underpin social scientific work on the measurement of happiness be problematised through such an understanding of the use of discourse? These are the research questions being posed in this thesis; this chapter addresses the second of these questions, by providing an overview of some of the work that has been undertaken on the measurement and determinants of happiness, mainly in economics, and of the assumptions that underpin such measurement and determinants. The proceeding chapter (Chapter 3) will then address the first question, by exploring some sociological literature that focuses upon ‘therapeutic’ discourse, a range of sociological and psychoanalytic approaches to the self more generally, as well as literature from the sociology of emotions, on the ways in which emotions can be understood to be shaped, experienced and interpreted through social and cultural processes. That chapter will then conclude by turning back to the second question and examining the ways in which the assumptions that underpin the existing work on happiness could be interrogated through an understanding of the relationship between happiness, culture and discourse.

Much of the existing social scientific work on the measurement and determinants of happiness is known as the economics of happiness, and has been mainly led by economists like Richard Easterlin (1974) and Richard Layard (2005), but also enhanced by ‘positive’ psychologists such as Martin Seligman (2002) and Daniel Kahneman (1999), who promote a psychology of positive human functioning. The general message that all such happiness
research emphasises is that measures of happiness are now necessary as 'social indicators' in order to monitor societal well-being and progress, as an alternative to more traditional economic measures such as GDP; these are no longer adequate predictors of subjective well-being (Easterlin 1974, Oswald 1997, Layard 2005). In line with this idea, economist Richard Easterlin argues that increases in income or national wealth are not always partnered by an increase in happiness (an idea known as the 'Easterlin Paradox'). Thus, such economists and psychologists have done extensive, largely quantitative work on uncovering the determinants of happiness, with a view that increased happiness (and thus an increase of the determinants of it) will lead to increased progress. Television and print media in the United Kingdom have reacted to this, and frequently report stories on the happiness levels of our society, that are seen to appeal to the general public.

Social indicators, a concept developed in the USA in the 1960s, can be defined as statistics that are used to measure societal conditions at a given time, in a given place. Raymond Bauer, perceived by many as the 'founding father' of the 'social indicators movement' defined the concept as follows:

"Social indicators [can be defined as] statistics, statistical series, and all other forms of evidence that enable us to assess where we stand and where we are going with respect to our values and goals." (Bauer, 1966:1)

Thus, in terms of the collection of happiness statistics for this purpose, social indicators and the monitoring of societal conditions and progress rest upon the theoretical assumption that the 'goals and values' of society are intimately linked with the idea of happiness.
Happiness measures – on a local, national or international level – are increasingly being utilised as subjective social indicators, and can serve as a complement to the existing economic, or objective social indicators (such as GDP, unemployment rates and crime rates) that have traditionally been used by many national governments for this purpose. It has been assumed that high levels of happiness represent societal progress, and a need to monitor such progress acts as a rationale for generating national measures of happiness. It is this recent interest in happiness as a measure of progress that has fuelled much of economists’ interest in the study of it.

An increasing number of economists have undertaken quantitative analyses of the determinants of happiness, using a variable that is derived from a ‘global’ happiness question that has been implemented in several large-scale social surveys, such as the European Social Survey (ESS), the Eurobarometer survey series and the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). Such a question asks: “Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are with your life?” Respondents would then be required to rate their happiness levels using a Likert scale. The question that ESS respondents are asked is as follows:

"Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are, 0 being extremely unhappy and 10 being extremely happy?" (Please ring as appropriate)

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Figure 2.1: Global happiness question as asked in the European Social Survey (ESS)
It is not only academics who seek to collect data on levels and determinants of people's happiness; many national governments have also recently acknowledged the importance of having such information with which societal progress can be monitored. Indeed, in November 2010, it was announced by Prime Minister David Cameron that the UK's subjective well-being is to be measured alongside its Gross Domestic Product (The Guardian 2010, Hawkes 2010). Respondents of the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Integrated Household Survey (which collects data from 200,000 individuals annually) will be asked questions on the topic from April 2011, and it is hoped that the data collected will play a key role in government policy-making. Jill Matheson, the National Statistician, stated at the time of this announcement that:

"New survey questions would be a powerful way to understand the well-being of people across the country, and for different places, different age groups, whether people are in work or not, and for other groups. But we want to do more than that. We need to show a wider picture, such as the environment, key statistics on health, levels of education and inequality in income and so on." (National Statistics, 2011: 2).

Although data are already collected by ONS on life satisfaction in the UK, this is only done via a 'global' measure like that presented in Figure 2.1 above; echoing the Easterlin Paradox, whilst GDP has doubled since the 1970s, life satisfaction has remained static during this period. Thus, whilst it is important that the economic performance of a country is monitored, broader quality of life measures are needed in order to assess the impact of progress on the environment (Office for National Statistics, 2011). It is hoped that the
Integrated Household Survey will provide a ‘richer’ measure of it. The questions that have been asked are as follows:

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

Respondents are required to answer each question using an eleven-point Likert scale that ranges from 0 to 10 (Office for National Statistics, 2011), like the happiness question shown above. It is expected that the first annual experimental estimates will be drawn from this in the summer of 2012.

**Happiness in Economics**

So why are economists increasingly concerned with happiness? Yew-Kwang Ng (1997) argued that there are two main reasons why happiness is an important area of economic investigation; firstly, happiness is considered to be an ultimate goal by most members of society, and the pursuit of money is seen by many as a route to finding happiness (Oswald 1997, Frank 1999). Second, as many economists have recently discovered, evidence from economically advanced countries shows that increases in income are not always partnered by an increase in happiness (Easterlin 1974, Oswald 1997, Layard 2005), and in some cases, this can even have a negative effect, such as the competitive feeling of needing to ‘keep up with the Joneses’ through excessive spending on luxury goods (Frank, 1999). Measures of happiness are thus necessary in order that both economic and subjective well-being can be monitored and regulated.
Similarly, economists Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer (2002) put forward a variety of reasons why economics ought to be concerned with the study of happiness. They firstly argue that the central premise upon which economic research ought to rest is that economics should be concerned with happiness, particularly with the way in which economic growth, unemployment, inflation and governance have a causal impact upon citizens' well-being, or utility, for which happiness variables are seen to be a proxy: "...happiness or reported subjective well-being is a satisfactory empirical approximation to individual utility." (Frey & Stutzer, 2005:210). Knowledge of this impact can then help to inform economic policy decisions. Secondly, they contend that there is room in economics for the investigation of the causal impact of non-financial factors, such as governance, on well-being; does heightened effectiveness and stability of government raise the happiness levels of individuals? Another way in which economists contribute to happiness research is by attempting "to solve empirical puzzles that conventional economic theories find difficult to explain." (2002:403) An example of this is the paradoxical finding discussed above that was first uncovered by the economist Richard Easterlin (1974), and has been echoed by many other scholars more recently: that although the West has seen a large increase in income since World War Two, levels of happiness and well-being have not followed suit. In order to investigate this paradox, economists have attempted to highlight some of the determinants of subjective well-being using social survey data, with a view that this could be used to inform public policy.

The 'Big Seven' Causes of Happiness

One economic work on happiness that has been published recently is Richard Layard's "Happiness: Lessons from a New Science" (2005). Layard summarises the findings of other
works that have focused on this paradoxical relationship between income and happiness and, after examination of American data from the General Social Survey (GSS), identifies seven major causes of it (as well as unhappiness), which he calls the ‘Big Seven’ (2005:63): family relationships (so, one’s marital status, and whether or not they have children); one’s financial situation; work (the ‘meaning’ people get from it as well as income); involvement in one’s community and network of friends; health; personal freedom (which is higher in the West than in Communist countries); and personal values (that is, ‘philosophy of life’ and an ability to ‘discipline’ one’s mind). He also puts forward a number of solutions for happier individuals and a happier society, including an increase in public spending on the expansion of mental health services and the number of therapists in the UK, in order to reduce the national incidence of depression. He asserts that, when looking at countries all over the world, for those with more than twenty thousand dollars per head (per year), increases in income do not lead to increases in happiness.

Each of Layard’s ‘Big Seven’ causes of happiness featured as variables in the GSS, and with regard to the first five causes, respondents were asked to report their happiness levels in each of these domains of life. Personal freedom was captured through a variable measuring ‘quality of government’, particularly with regard to the unhappiness that has been found to be associated with Communist societies, in which there is a lack of freedom (Layard, 2005). Personal values, or an ability to ‘discipline’ one’s mind, were captured through a variable measuring the self-reported importance of God in an individual’s life, as it was expected that these two factors would be associated. Layard asserts that those with higher levels of personal freedom and personal values are likely to be happier. He ranked the first five causes in order of ‘importance’, based on the happiness ratings assigned by respondents to each. Personal freedom and values were not ranked in the same way because these were
measured using a different scale (that is, these were not measured specifically in relation to happiness; rather, Layard appears to make theoretical assumptions that these are causally related to happiness). The order was as follows:

- Family relationships
- Financial situation
- Work
- Community and friends
- Health
- Personal freedom
- Personal values

Indeed, much of the work undertaken by social scientists that forms part of the body of work that is the economics of happiness on its measurement and its determinants also highlights many of the above factors as causes of happiness, and thus Layard's 'Big Seven' seems an appropriate starting point with which to interrogate or problematise the main tenets of this body of work. However, a caveat to note here is that it is not Layard's work per se that this thesis seeks to interrogate, but rather, it will use his model of the 'Big Seven' causes of happiness as an exemplar of the determinants that much of the work in this field puts forward.

Firstly, with regard to family relationships, Layard asserts that this causally links with happiness: "differences in family situation cause a huge difference in happiness." (2005: 65). Family relationships were found to be the most 'important' cause of happiness for Layard;
the negative effect of being divorced, separated or widowed on one’s happiness is at least double that of losing a third of one’s income. He established a causal link between family situation and happiness through an analysis of German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) data, whereby men and women who are married generally become happier as a result of this. The reverse pattern was found for those who are divorced. Layard suggests that reasons for this may be that married people have better sex lives than those who are not, and they also tend to be healthier (Gardner and Oswald, 2002); he also highlights the importance of a loving relationship for happiness.

Financial situation, or income, is the next most ‘important’ of Layard’s ‘Big Seven’ causes of happiness. He asserts that most people care about their income, and in particular, their relative income. So, people desire a financial situation that is superior to others around them, whether high or low in absolute terms (Layard, 2005). In addition, people’s happiness with their income also depends upon what they are used to getting, and thus “richer people always say they need more than poorer people.” (2005: 42). In other words, for Layard, richer people are more likely than poorer people to need more money in order to be satisfied with their lives. Richard Easterlin (2001) undertook a similar study of the relationship between income and happiness, using American data from the General Social Survey. Although those with higher incomes generally gave higher happiness scores, they also had higher material aspirations, and these had an inverse relationship with well-being. He argued that people “judge prospective higher income situations more favourably than when they actually are in those situations, because they fail to anticipate the rise in material aspirations that will come with the growth in income.” (Easterlin, 2001:481). Thus although higher income was generally associated with happiness, an increase in income did not necessarily have the same relationship.
The third of the ‘Big Seven’ causes of happiness is work. Layard suggests that this is so not only because of the income that work can provide, but also because of the feeling it brings of contribution to wider society and because of the meaning that it brings to one’s life (Layard, 2005). His analysis of GSOEP data also showed that the negative effect that unemployment has on happiness is higher than that of losing income, for this reason; unhappiness levels of those who are unemployed also tend to remain after one or two years of unemployment. People do not habituate to the situation, as they may do with loss of income. According to Layard, people who are employed are also more likely to be unhappy if unemployment levels are generally high, as they may fear the potentiality of it for themselves. Thus, its effects are twofold. A sense of fulfilment is also an important determinant of happiness for Layard; people are more likely to be happy if they have control over their work. A lack of this is likely to bring about unhappiness. Andrew Oswald also looked at the impact of employment on happiness levels (Oswald, 1997) using British data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) in 1991. Again, echoing Layard’s findings, not having a job had a strong negative relationship with happiness, and he concluded that the source of unhappiness for unemployed people was less likely to be the lack of income that results from this situation, but instead, the non-material ‘distress’, lack of fulfilment and boredom that economic inactivity may bring about.

Friendship and community are also important ingredients for a happy life, according to Layard. Related to this are levels of interpersonal trust, which he found to correlate highly with happiness. Social ties with others in one’s community are known to some researchers as ‘social capital’. Indeed, a close link has been found between this and happiness by many studies, such as one by Helliwell & Putnam (2004), in which they analysed data from the
World Values Survey (WVS) (in which about fifty countries are covered) – between 1980 and 1997 in order to explore the ‘social context’ of people’s subjective evaluations of happiness. They found that that those who are married, have close networks with friends, neighbours and colleagues, are involved in their local community and are trusting and trustworthy tend to be happier than those who are not or who have not. At the local level, an Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS) research report by Campbell, Bodley and Berkley – Measuring Quality of Life: Does Local Environmental Quality Matter? (2007) – reported results of a study on the impact of local environmental quality on people’s satisfaction with the conditions in which they live. Three and a half thousand randomly selected adults were surveyed over the telephone; the survey included a general satisfaction question with a five-point response scale, ranging from ‘not very satisfied’ to ‘very satisfied’. Several factors were found to be key to having a good quality of life, the most important being good health, enough money for basic provisions and good relationships with family and friends. Neighbourhoods were also found to be important – particularly a sense of belonging or community spirit, thus again echoing Layard’s suggestions about the importance of community and friendship networks.

The fifth of the ‘Big Seven’ causes of happiness is health. This has been identified as a major determinant of happiness (Campbell, Bodley & Berkley 2007, Diener & Seligman 2004), although it is not the most important. Layard suggests that this may be because people with poor health adapt well to the limitations that their condition may have placed on them. Indeed, this thesis also found, in undertaking semi-structured interviews that health was considered slightly less important by many respondents than some of the other factors discussed above; in response to the question ‘what makes you most happy in life?’ it was mentioned less frequently than others overall. One possible reason for this is that those who
are healthy (as most respondents were) are less likely to acknowledge any happiness they gain from this than those who are in poor health who may recognise its impact on their unhappiness.

The final two factors that Layard identifies are personal freedom and personal values. With regard to personal freedom, he refers to the quality of government and the unhappiness that is associated with lack of freedom under Communism; using World Values Survey (WVS) data, he notes the difference between the happiness of those in Communist Belarus and that of those in post-Communist Hungary (Layard, 2005), and attributes this to the freedom enjoyed by post-Communist countries. Surprisingly, what Layard does not acknowledge with regard to this is subjective, or a self-identified sense of freedom; one thing that this thesis has found (as have many other studies) is that individuals are likely to experience more happiness if they feel that they have autonomy and control over their own everyday lives (Rose 1996, Furedi 2004). This will be explored further in the following chapter. Layard also asserts the importance of personal values for happiness, with which he discusses “our inner self and philosophy of life”. (2005: 71). He suggests that people who are able to ‘discipline’ their minds — perhaps via methods such as cognitive behaviour therapy, Buddhist mindfulness or a belief in God — and who “find comfort from within” (2005: 72) are likely to be happier. He presents WVS data that show that a relationship between happiness and a belief in God exists at both the individual and national level, and thus argues that belief causes happiness to some degree.

The current thesis

A range of studies in Economics (including Richard Layard’s) have demonstrated the ways in which happiness is strongly associated with each of these seven factors; however, few, if
any, take steps to explain how or why these specific factors are important for happiness, and how they are experienced on an everyday level. Rather, they simply describe and chart the way in which they each impact upon happiness levels in a national or international context. This thesis will therefore seek to problematise, but also complement, this picture, by providing a more sociological, cultural understanding of happiness in relation to these factors at the level of individual experience.

The thesis will focus specifically on four determinants of happiness: family relationships, financial situation, work and community and friends; these were also the top four of Layard’s ‘Big Seven’ causes. Chapter 7 centres around happiness and interpersonal relationships; this considers both family relationships and friends and community. Chapter 8 then examines the relationship between happiness and people’s orientations to money and working life (thus exploring both financial situation and work). Whilst it was originally intended that health as a determinant of happiness would also be explored in this thesis, it has been decided that analysis will be limited to that of the four listed above; this is because – similarly to Layard’s findings – health was considered by most of the respondents who took part in this study as a less important part of a happy life, and thus less data were collected on this. Instead, chapters 5 and 6 explore the discourses that people use to produce their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness; Layard’s four factors will then be considered in chapters 7 and 8 in relation to these discourses.

Summary

The body of work that is known as the economics of happiness, then, has presented a number of factors that are considered to be key determinants of happiness; these have been established by scholars, who are largely economists, through analysis of survey data, in
which happiness as a variable has been measured using questions such as that shown in Figure 2.1. Happiness is increasingly being measured by social scientists and national governments alike, in order to gain a subjective understanding of societal progress.

All of the ‘Big Seven’ factors identified by Layard (and endorsed by many other happiness scholars mentioned above) may indeed be central to the experience of happiness, and were identified as such by the respondents who took part in this study. However, I wish to argue in this thesis that these suggestions can be further interrogated and that a sociological understanding of each of these factors can provide a broader picture of people’s everyday experiences and perceptions of happiness; by understanding the way in which discourse is used in the production of accounts of these experiences and perceptions, happiness can be examined through a more holistic lens.

It is, therefore, sociological literature to which the thesis will now turn, in addressing the other research question of this thesis: how do people use discourse in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness in contemporary Britain? Little work exists thus far on discourses of happiness; however, the next chapter will explore literature in a number of related areas that can aid in understanding this idea, namely, studies from the sociology of emotions that explore the ways in which emotions like happiness are shaped, experienced and interpreted through social and cultural processes, work that examines the way in which people locate themselves within ‘therapeutic discourse’ in making sense of their everyday lives and literature on a range of sociological conceptions of the self.
Chapter 3
Happiness through a cultural lens: the missing dimension

This chapter provides an account of the theoretical literature on happiness and culture. Having an understanding of the way in which happiness may be shaped by the use of discourse can then enable an interrogation, through a cultural lens such as this one, of the assumptions and the tenets of much of the work undertaken by economists explored in the previous chapter, that examines the measurement and determinants of happiness.

Studies of happiness in this way are not new; philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato explored what happiness is as early as the Fourth Century BC, and have, along with later philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, laid the groundwork for theorising about happiness. This chapter will begin by briefly exploring the ideas of these philosophers, before undertaking an exploration of relevant sociological literature.

Happiness in Philosophy

Plato, in The Republic (380 BC/1998) wrote about the way in which a balanced soul which is free of any conflict is central to the idea of happiness, or eudaimonia (a Greek word meaning ‘flourishing’). Having this means that happiness — or, a state of absolute peace, joy and contentment — can be achieved. For Plato, one way in which happiness can be achieved is by acquiring the virtue of justice, where each part of the human soul is working in harmony. Having such a soul would prevent any external or material circumstances from allowing a person to lose their inner composure. Happiness for Plato can also be achieved through the practice of philosophy, or by contemplating the world of ‘being’; this is eternal, in contrast to
the impermanence of aspects of the physical world. In both cases then, happiness is achieved when an individual achieves internal balance and harmony. Whether this resonates with any of the discourses used by people in producing their accounts of their own experiences and perceptions of happiness will be explored in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the thesis.

Aristotle – a pupil of Plato’s – also wrote about happiness, and stated that it is intimately related to virtue (350 BC/1998). Like Plato, he used the Greek word ‘eudaimonia’ to refer to happiness. This he related more to the idea of flourishing, which, rather than an emotional state, is about fulfilling one’s potential and being a virtuous and good person. Virtue, for Aristotle, can be achieved by having a balance between excesses and deficiencies of things. For example, central to virtue is courage – a balance between rashness and cowardice – and generosity – a balance between wastefulness and miserliness. In other words, it is moderation, rather than extremes, that is important for the achievement of eudaimonia. Again, the relevance of this to the discourses that people used to articulate their own experiences and perceptions of happiness will be explored in the analytic chapters of the thesis.

Another branch of philosophy that is concerned with happiness is Utilitarianism, the main proponents of which were Jeremy Bentham and his student, John Stuart Mill. Established in the eighteenth century, utilitarianism was an ethical theory that placed emphasis upon the overall ‘good’ of society, and promoted policies and behaviours that brought about “the greatest good for the greatest number of people.” (Bentham, 1789/2009). He devised a ‘felicific calculus’ based on a number of variables in order to calculate the level of pleasure or ‘good’ that an action or a policy would bring about. The higher the level, the more morally
'right' it was considered to be. Mill also adopted the 'greatest happiness principle' (1863/2001), and, like Bentham, saw acts that brought about the greatest 'good' as the most moral. However, whilst Bentham does not favour any particular form of happiness over another, Mill argues that intellectual and moral pleasures are superior to physical ones. He also distinguishes between 'higher' and 'lower' forms of happiness, suggesting that people who have not experienced 'high culture' are only able to experience 'lower' forms of happiness, or 'simple pleasures'.

Happiness and Sociology

As discussed in the Introduction, happiness is an under-researched area in sociology; whilst the economic and psychological literature around it has rapidly flourished over recent decades, sociology has not followed suit, and as a result, there is a dearth of sociological literature on the topic, particularly with regard to the relationship of happiness with culture and discourse. However, there are other bodies of work within sociology that can be drawn upon to illustrate this relationship.

First, the chapter explores 'therapy culture'. There is a growing body of literature around this phenomenon, and the chapter will explore the ways in which people locate themselves within 'therapeutic discourse' in order to produce their selves and their accounts of their everyday lives in terms of a specific culturally-rooted version of personhood that this discourse advocates. It also considers the way in which therapeutic discourse is intimately linked to specific notions of the self, and is used by people to specifically produce their accounts of happiness.
Sociological literature on the self is then considered. Theories of symbolic interactionism and 
dramaturgy are explored, before the concepts of the 'reflexive self' and 'technologies of the 
self' are examined. The chapter will then consider how selves can be classed, before looking 
at psychoanalytic theories concerning the self as a mediator between the individual psyche 
and society.

Some of the work that forms the subdiscipline of the sociology of emotions is also explored. 
As well as being considered an aspect of the self and identity (which is produced via 
therapeutic discourse), happiness can and is also seen as an emotion that can be 'felt' – 
often, but not always, on a short-term level. This will also be further explained in the analytic 
chapters of the thesis. This literature will be used to illustrate the ways in which emotions 
can be understood to be shaped, experienced and interpreted through cultural, and indeed, 
social, processes.

This chapter then concludes by revisiting the second research question of this thesis, which 
has been addressed in chapter 2: how can some of the assumptions that underpin social 
scientific work on the measurement of happiness be problematised through such an 
understanding of the use of discourse? It briefly discusses the ways in which an 
understanding of the arguments raised in the sociological literature explored in this chapter 
can be used to interrogate the assumptions and tenets around which the existing work on 
happiness circulates. Indeed, an understanding of the socio-cultural experience of happiness 
has been overlooked by economics scholars, and it is thus the intention of this thesis to 
attempt to highlight the ways in which the economics of happiness could be enhanced by 
the incorporation of a cultural dimension and an acknowledgment of its everyday 
experience and discourses.
Therapeutic culture

Some sociologists have argued that the last few decades of the twentieth century saw the start of an age characterised by a ‘therapy culture’. Frank Furedi (2004) talks about the way in which “therapeutic language and practices have expanded into everyday life.” (2004:1). He argues that everyday experiences and activities are being talked and thought about in a more ‘emotional’ way, and that words which were previously confined to the realm of psychotherapy and psychology (or the ‘psy sciences’), such as ‘stress’, ‘anxiety’, ‘trauma’ and ‘syndrome’ are now commonly appearing in our everyday vocabulary to describe not just troublesome experiences, but also those considered ‘normal’:

“Through pathologising negative emotional responses to the pressures of life, contemporary culture unwittingly encourages people to feel traumatised and depressed by experiences hitherto regarded as routine.” (Furedi, 2004:6)

Nikolas Rose, similarly, argues that “therapeutics has subjectified the mundane.” (Rose, 1996:158). In other words, everyday life experiences such as debt, marriage, divorce and childbirth have been transformed into emotion-laden ‘life events’ for which ‘coping’ and ‘adjustment’ are required.

Rose, in his book “Inventing Our Selves” (1996), suggests that the behaviour of individuals living in advanced liberal democracies is centred around their desire for the maximisation of happiness and physical and mental well-being. This originates from the promotion of an image of the human being, created by the ‘enterprise culture’ of the late 1980s (that is still prevalent today), as being a subjective, autonomous individual who strives for personal
fulfilment, with the capacity to do so via acts of choice. Taking a Foucauldian approach, Rose argues that political power is exercised through the promotion of this subjectivity, rather than working to suppress it (Foucault, 1982) and that this subjectivity is fundamental to procedures of regulation and governmentality. Thus, people are likely to decide to behave in ways that would induce positive emotions (like happiness) and minimise negative feeling. This can be summarised as follows:

"Contemporary individuals are incited to live as if making a project of themselves: they are to work on their emotional world, their domestic and conjugal arrangements, their relations with employment and their techniques of sexual pleasure, to develop a 'style' of living that will maximise the worth of their existence to themselves. Evidence from the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom suggests that the implantation of such 'identity projects', characteristic of advanced liberal democracies, is constitutively linked to the rise of a new breed of spiritual directors, 'engineers of the human soul'... [the activities of these figures] ... promise to allow us to transform our selves in the direction of happiness and fulfilment.” (Rose, 1996:157).

The idea of the autonomous individual that Rose advocates, and the ‘enterprise culture’ to which subjectivity is central could be said to be a cause of the onset of this ‘therapeutic culture’. If individuals are aiming toward the maximisation of mental and physical well-being, as well as for a deeper understanding of their selves, doing so through a discourse characterised by such emotional language seems more than appropriate. Indeed, Furedi (2004) asserts that “...therapeutic culture provides a script through which individuals develop a distinct understanding of their selves and of their relationship with others.”
In other words, according to Rose and Furedi, therapy culture is considered a kind of cultural discourse or resource that individuals draw upon to make sense of their everyday lives and experiences. Not only are individuals provided with this ‘script’ with which to articulate their experiences, but they also actively work to create this resource or this culture that underlies their perceptions of their selves and their lives, and they learn to articulate these perceptions through producing and reproducing this therapeutic – or ‘psy’ - discourse.

Therapeutic culture, or the ‘therapeutic turn’, has been theorised by a number of other sociologists over the last fifty years. Much has been written on the increasing popularity of therapy and counselling as a solution to personal problems, the permeation of ‘psychological’ language into everyday, lay vocabulary and the increased preoccupation with the self and emotional life that Western societies have witnessed in recent years (Rieff 1966, Lasch 1979, Bellah 1985, Wright 2008). It could also be said that this cultural turn is resulting in more people being ‘in touch’ with their feelings; American sociologist Robert Bellah (1985) has written about how the expansion of the realm of therapy toward the end of the twentieth century has led to a general increase in concern for monitoring, managing and expressing feelings. This is evident in the rise of the term ‘emotional intelligence’, popularised by psychologist Daniel Goleman (1996) after the publication of his book with the same title in the late 1990s. The term refers to “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions.” (Mayer and Salovey, 1993:433). The book is now a popular bestseller in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, which suggests that this kind of culture and vocabulary is being increasingly used by many to make sense of their lives and experiences.
Eva Illouz (2007) asserts that we are now living in a culture of ‘emotional capitalism’, or “...a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other...” (Illouz, 2007:5). She describes the way in which twentieth century culture has become preoccupied with emotional life, and like Furedi, argues that ‘emotional language’ taken from psychology and other ‘psy sciences’ has been incorporated into everyday vocabularies. Emotion has also become increasingly central to the workplace; managers are encouraged to display sympathy and an ability to listen to others, and the idea of ‘communication’ is seen as fundamental to the everyday running of the organisation, relying on the proper management of emotions. She attributes this change in culture to the passing of the 1946 National Mental Health Act in the USA; this meant that in the early 1950s, the work of psychologists began to extend to the mental health of ordinary citizens, rather than simply intense mental disorders. This led to an expansion of the market of therapeutic services, and she notes that “by the 1960s, psychology had become fully institutionalised and had become an intrinsic aspect of American popular culture.” (Illouz, 2007:25). Whilst this may have happened slightly later in the United Kingdom, it is also evident that similar changes have taken place. Illouz discusses one phenomenon that has emerged as a result of this therapeutic culture; self-help and advice literature, whose popularity both in the United States and the United Kingdom has soared over the last few decades. Such literature emphasises the importance of the reader finding their ‘true self’ after ‘overcoming’ negative emotions such as fear, shame or guilt (which may have been unconsciously felt), in order that happiness can be achieved and the ‘true self’ can be found. The state of happiness is defined as healthy and desirable, and rather than being viewed as a natural part of emotional experience, negative emotions are seen to be a destructive force preventing individuals from achieving happiness and in need of eradication. Any ‘complications’ that may stand in the way of true happiness may also be made sense of in reference to events in
one's past. Thus, Illouz says, the publication of such advice literature has led to private life and emotions being made into measurable and calculable objects that can be detached from the self and managed, controlled and manipulated. However, the kind of language used in these sorts of texts is also found in everyday settings in the form of a 'therapeutic narrative', through which people describe and make sense of experiences, and which makes what were hitherto more private emotions into objects that are publicly displayed and discussed. Examples of this are the television talk show on which members of the public discuss and attempt to resolve their personal problems, or even reality talent shows such as the 'X-Factor', of which a central feature is the displaying of contestants' open emotional reactions to the judging panel's decisions. In discussing the therapeutic narrative further, Illouz states that such a narrative is used when individuals recount their life stories, to which suffering is often central:

"...identity is found and expressed in the experience of suffering and in the understanding of emotions gained by the telling of the story." (Illouz, 2007:53).

As discussed above, experiences of suffering are often attributed to events in one's past, and people make sense of their selves and identities through such negative experiences. Thus, again, Illouz suggests that it is through culture that people are able to make sense of their experiences and this is done in a very particular way, whereby emotions and the idea of 'suffering' are central.

Also related to therapeutic culture, individuals make use of what Michel Foucault has termed 'technologies of the self', that "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls,
thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” (Foucault, 1988: 18).

Foucault explains how the notion of the ‘care of the self’ (1986), first used by Socrates in Greco-Roman philosophy in the first two centuries AD, lies at the centre of the ‘art of existence’. This is a central tenet of therapeutic culture, and can be seen in the overwhelming popularity in contemporary Western societies of self-help guides, anti-depressants or even ‘relaxing’ leisure activities like yoga or Pilates on which people draw to make themselves feel more positive or happy about life. This can be done with the help of so-called ‘engineers of the human soul’, such as therapists, authors of self-help books or yoga instructors, who earn a living using their expertise and knowledge of human subjectivity. Thus, one could say that such devices act as aids to emotion management (Hochschild, 1983: see below for further discussion of this concept) that can mask, or even eradicate negative feelings that are classed by society as undesirable, and bring about positive emotions that enhance overall quality of life. Furthermore, it is in this way that a desire for happiness can facilitate social control; a need to seek happiness and to be reasonably happy is portrayed by society as a central goal of the everyday lives of most individuals. Via a process of normalization (Foucault, 1977), a certain level of happiness is considered desirable, healthy or ‘normal’ by wider society and if, for any reason, one fell below this threshold of happiness, they may be compelled or encouraged to draw on external sources (whether it be a therapist, anti-depressants, sharing ‘problems’ with close friends or family or so on) in order that an acceptable or ‘normal’ level of contentment is regained. Thus, culture ‘prescribes’ socially desirable behaviour that is conducive to happiness. Foucault’s precept of the ‘care of the self’ is also a central part of the therapeutic culture that people use to make sense of their experiences of happiness; they may undertake this self-care in order to maintain or increase feelings of happiness. Individuals
who are able to care for themselves in this way are considered to be more 'effective' citizens who are able to take responsibility for themselves (Rose 1996, Hazleden 2003).

As stated above, one way in which people may seek to care for their selves is via the self-help book; indeed, therapeutic discourse is largely used by the authors of these books in offering advice to their readers. Heidi Rimke (2000) has undertaken an exploration of contemporary self-help literature with regard to the way in which readers or subjects are compelled to pursue self-improvement. She writes about the way in which the self-improvement techniques that the books advise readers to engage in are closely linked with the political organisation of neo-liberal societies, in that the caring for and fashioning of selves ensures that effective citizens, who are able to take responsibility for themselves, are produced (Rimke, 2000). That is, "the self becomes an object of knowledge and a subject/object of governance, not simply under the gaze of an expert acting at a distance but, most importantly, under the ever-present gaze of one's self." (2000:68).

Caring for the self, and self-examination, according to Rimke, are championed by self-help texts as something that readers must strive towards in order to better themselves and to be happy (2000). They are encouraged to engage in internal dialogue and ask themselves questions in order to achieve self-improvement. These are central tenets of therapeutic discourse, and Rimke suggests that it is via such books and manuals that the discourse creates truths about people and the ways in which their selves and characters operate (Foucault 1972; see Chapter 1 for further discussion of discourse). Indeed, as Foucault states: "In the self-help tradition the examination of one's self paves the way to self-knowledge by 'superimposing truth about self through memory, that is by memorizing the rules' of self-regulation." (Foucault, 1988: 43). It is in this way that therapeutic discourse
creates truth about the self, and in this case, it is via the medium of the self-help text that this creation of truth is established.

However, the therapeutic discourse that constitutes self-help literature serves to obscure the ways in which human beings are essentially interdependent and collective (Rimke, 2000). That is, self-examination, care for the self and personal autonomy are presented as essential truths in these texts, and they have come to constitute the primary, and indeed 'normal', way in which many people see themselves. The idea that this kind of self-examination may be inextricably bound up with a social arena (that is, the political organisation of neoliberal democracies) and not from 'inside' the self is not necessarily evident or obvious to the majority of people, for whom modes of personhood are made sense of via psychological and individual ideas.

Self-help literature was also a focus of Rebecca Hazleden's (2003) work. She demonstrates, through an analysis of a sample of relationship manuals, the way in which they set up a relation of the reader's self to itself, and suggests that this relation is a key aspect of therapeutic, or 'psy', discourse. For example, Joyce Vedral, in her relationship manual, Get Rid of Him! (1994), advises readers:

“What is self-esteem anyway? It is your reputation with yourself – in essence, it is what, over time, you have come to believe about yourself. If you have low self-esteem, you have built up a bad reputation with yourself. If you have high self-esteem, you have built up a good reputation with yourself.” (Vedral, 1994:20).
By encouraging readers to reflect on the reputation that they have with their selves, Vedral (and indeed, other self-help authors whose texts Hazleden found to use similar language) presents the self as being "ontologically separate from itself" (Hazleden, 2003:416). The self, therefore, becomes the primary site on which individuals are invited to 'work'; the end result of this 'work', Hazleden says, is the individual becoming more aware of his or her 'true' self, from which they may have become separated. Emphasis is also placed in these texts upon the importance of the individual learning to know, and furthermore, love his or her self. This can be done by engaging in internal dialogue with oneself, and is particularly important when one is in — or about to begin — an intimate relationship (Hazleden, 2003). A relationship

"depends not on your ability to attract the perfect mate, but on your willingness to acquire knowledge about hidden parts of yourself.” (Hendrix, 1997:xvi).

Hazleden also suggests that such books advise readers that acquiring self-knowledge in this way allows them to position themselves on a desired 'life path' (2003:421) so that personal fulfilment can be achieved. She says that, according to the books, “we are to aspire to be effective, fulfilled and autonomous selves, on an individual, progressive and linear journey through life, with the sole responsibility for the direction that this journey takes.” (2003:421). One should not, therefore, rely on anybody else for this fulfilment, but rather, they should be self-sufficient in developing technologies of the self such as self-knowledge and self-love. Thus, not only is this particular constitution of the self central to therapeutic discourse used in self-help texts, but it is also key — as Hazleden shows us — to the way in which many people may seek to transform themselves into fulfilled and happy individuals (both in their relationships and otherwise).
The self, and constitutions of it, are thus central to ideas around personal fulfilment and happiness, and sociological literature on the self will therefore be explored here.

The Self

A wide range of social scientific perspectives exist on the self; this section, rather than offering an exhaustive account of all of them, puts forward an overview of theories of the self that can be best applied to the research questions of this thesis.

The Self and Symbolic Interactionism

The self is not simply a private domain, but is something for which other people – or selves – and cultural norms are important. "... the self can be thought of as a central mechanism through which the individual and the social world intersect." (Elliott, 2001:24). Symbolic Interactionism is one theoretical tradition, pioneered by social psychologist George Herbert Mead, that postulates an account of the social dimensions of the self. In particular, language, communication and symbols are important in the constitution of the self, and it is interaction with others that enables one's sense of selfhood to be formed (Mead, 1934). Through the use of language, individuals can make use of symbols with which to communicate with one another; a shared language acts as a common currency of symbols through which people interact and form a sense of self. According to Mead, "the individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group; and the structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behaviour pattern of this social group to which he belongs..." (1934:164). In other words, we see our selves in the way that other people see us, and it is through social interaction with others that we adjust the way
we see and understand ourselves. Thus, for Mead and for other symbolic interactionists, the self is an outcome of social – or symbolic – interaction. Mead also makes a distinction between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ in his conceptualisation of the self (1934). The ‘me’ is the socialised self which arises and is created through the attitudes of others, in social interaction. It is what an individual learns from the responses of others to him or herself. The ‘I’, on the other hand, is the active aspect of the self, which is made up one’s personal desires and dispositions, but which also responds to the ‘me’, or to the attitudes of others. The self is thus not simply a reflection of the attitudes of the rest of society, as the ‘I’ is accorded some agency. "The attitudes involved are gathered from the group, but the individual in whom they are organised has the opportunity of giving them an expression which perhaps has never taken place before." (Mead, 1934:198). Mead also highlights the concept of the 'generalised other’, which is a term that refers to the set of expectations that others in a group, community or a society have about human action and behaviour. An individual “takes the attitude of the generalised other” (1934:155) when they seek to behave in accordance with what is expected of them by others. So, for Mead, it is the interpretation and construction of meanings of behaviour that is at the heart of the constitution of the self. Indeed, his ideas can be applied to happiness; as will be shown in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, it is often through the attitudes of others that people create their own sense of happiness. They may take the attitude of the ‘generalised other’ in assessing whether or not they are happy, by considering themselves as happy when their circumstances are those which are deemed by others as being conducive to happiness.

**The Self and Dramaturgy**

Erving Goffman (1959) was influenced by symbolic interactionism, but took a dramaturgical approach to the study of society and the constitution of self. At the heart of this approach is
the idea that people are social 'actors' who play roles and give dramatic performances during social interaction, and who continually monitor the impressions that they are giving others when doing so. For Goffman then, self is not bound up with 'inner' character, but is something that is performed for an 'audience'. In giving performances, individuals adhere to social norms and roles that accord with societal expectations of how one should behave in a given situation, although they also have some agency in deciding exactly how such roles should be performed. Goffman also distinguishes between 'frontstage' and 'backstage' behaviour, wherein people might project different types of self. In 'frontstage' performances, people may conceal aspects of their self that they see as being inappropriate to the social setting that they are in, whereas when they are in the 'back' region, their appearance or self-image does not need to be monitored as closely. These ideas can be applied to happiness, as there may be specific 'frontstage' situations in which it is deemed appropriate to present oneself as happy, particularly in the workplace. For example, a university lecturer may present a happy and enthusiastic self-image when teaching and interacting with their students, but when alone in his or her office, they may experience and display tiredness or frustration in response to a heavy workload. Arlie Russell Hochschild (1979, 1983) has extended Goffman's ideas in this way, and has applied them to the idea of 'emotion work' or 'emotion management' that may be undertaken by service sector workers who seek to project happy self-images. This will be further explored later in this chapter, under the heading of 'The Dramaturgical approach to emotion'.

**The Reflexive Self**

A number of other theorists argue that the idea of 'reflexivity' is at the core of the self. One of these is Anthony Giddens (1991, 1992). For him, it is "a self-defining process that depends upon monitoring of, and reflection upon, psychological and social information about possible
trajectories of life" (Elliott, 2001:37) that is central to the constitution of self. He suggests that reflexivity is central to the development of 'life politics' where individuals seek to construct and reconstruct a biography or a narrative of self-identity throughout their life course. That is, people feel encouraged to continually reflect on their lives and events that occur, and to seek to transform their sense of self by 'moving forward' (Giddens, 1991). He thus puts forward a model of the self that is both able to reflect on itself and know itself; similarly to theorists of the therapeutic turn explored above, the self is seen to be something separate from the individual, and as something that can be worked on.

Ulrich Beck (1992) puts forward a model of the self similar to that of Giddens, and suggests that contemporary societies are characterised by 'reflexive modernity'. Modern societies, for Beck, are 'risk societies' in which new manufactured risks, produced by humans, are emerging. At the heart of this is a society of voluntarist, autonomous individuals who, in seeking to mitigate these risks, reflect on the processes that are going on around them.

Happiness may be an important feature of the reflexive self; it may be considered by many people as an aim or a goal of the 'work' they may do on themselves. Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman, who postulates a similar concept of 'liquid modernity', whereby traditional institutions are less fixed and can no longer be used by people as frames of reference with which to plan their lives or actions (Bauman, 2000), suggests that we now need to be 'artists of life' (2008). In other words, we must seek to give our lives purpose, by reflecting on our lives and actions. The purpose of the 'art of life', Bauman says, is happiness, and this should be sought via an individual 'life project' (2000).

Technologies of the Self

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One aspect of Michel Foucault's writings is 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988). This refers to the way in which the self is something that individuals are able to creatively construct, or that which they can 'care' for and come to understand; simultaneously, however, self-expression is constrained by social forces, and more specifically, by power. Foucault suggests that the rise of techniques for the 'care' of the self is linked to sexual repression in nineteenth-century Victorian society (1978). At this time, attempts were made by state officials and medical professionals to regulate and control sexual behaviour, particularly that which breached adult sexual norms. Society has begun to police itself in this respect; people seek to monitor and control their own sexual desires. Foucault linked this to the role of confession; the Catholic confessional was a forum in which individuals were able to tell priests truths about themselves, particularly with regard to sexual desires. Stemming from this, society at large has become 'confessional' (Foucault, 1986), and confessional discourse has become central to the ways in which people understand the self. For example, people now do this in psychotherapy settings, whereby they seek to confess their sexual practices and desires; this form of confession, Foucault says, is a means of examining oneself, caring for the self; that is, a technology of the self. The same could also be said for self-help manuals, particularly those centred around intimate relationships; by reading these and seeking to follow the sexual protocols that they advise readers to adhere to, people are able to care for, and 'work on' their selves. They are, similarly, able to do so by drawing on expert knowledge produced across the 'psy' sciences such as psychology and psychiatry (Rose, 1996). In other words, for Foucault, controlling oneself sexually in this way established a sense of worthiness for the individual. Thus, the self here is something that can be cared for and worked on, whilst simultaneously being controlled by societal forces.
Pierre Bourdieu has, in many of his writings, put forward ideas that suggest the self is classed. He writes about the way in which the social positions that people occupy are based on the amount of capital they possess or accumulate (Bourdieu, 1986b). He distinguishes between three types: economic capital, which refers to one's level of command over economic or financial resources, or wealth; social capital, which refers to one's membership of groups or social networks; and cultural capital, or the knowledge, education and skills that one gains during their life. He also highlights a fourth type, symbolic capital, which are the resources that people may accumulate on the basis of honour or prestige. For Bourdieu, the accumulation of capital is equated with the accrual of value for the self. He also uses the concept of habitus, which is "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions." (2000:82-3). In other words, the capital (and thus value) that people accumulate is displayed as dispositions, and it is the habitus that is the embodiment of this (Skeggs 2005, Bourdieu 2000). The constitution of the self for Bourdieu, then, is concerned with people's personal dispositions, perceptions and appreciations, but at the same time, is bound up with structures that are not necessarily within their control (such as available resources and capital, to which access is not equal).

The self, then, is something that can accrue value. For example, a person can gain cultural capital through attending art galleries and operas, and this can increase the exchange value of their selfhood by providing them with increased knowledge and perhaps enhanced employability (Skeggs 2005). However, people do not necessarily have equal access to resources that enable them to accrue value and capital, and to 'work' on their selves (see Foucault 1986, Rose 1996 in previous sections), as selves are embedded in the conditions in which they are initially constituted. That is, they are located in specific social positions that
are based on the amount of capital they possess. Thus, those with less capital accrue less value and lack access to resources with which to acquire it. Beverley Skeggs (2005) writes about how exchange-value is imbued with morality, and therefore those who cannot accrue value are regarded (often by those who can) as immoral. They lack middle-class habitus and dispositions, and are therefore seen to lack taste. Rather than this being regarded as a part of a class struggle, as Bourdieu would, this is seen as a failure of the self to know how to behave in a ‘proper’, moral fashion. It is in this way that Bourdieu’s conception of the classed self could be used as a critique of the models of the reflexive self and of technologies of the self discussed above; people do not have equal access to the resources, practices and dispositions necessary to ‘work’ on oneself (Foucault, 1986), or to be an ‘artist of life’ (Bauman, 2008) as such. Instead, for Bourdieu, it may only be members of the middle class, or those who have accrued more exchange value (or capital) who have such access.

Bourdieu, in his critique of Kant’s Critique of Judgement (1986a), also highlighted the way in which ideas of what constitutes ‘good taste’ were actually those which were the tastes of the upper and middle classes, that is, those with the power to propose definitions as such. All of those who possess such tastes share a common middle-class aesthetic. They are able to appreciate that which is ‘truly beautiful’, as opposed to those who only have a ‘facile’ aesthetic, that is, an ability to only appreciate simple pleasures. People with a ‘facile’ aesthetic are not considered to have good taste, and are thus regarded by the middle class as being tasteless as well as excessive, as excess and extravagance is also regarded by middle-class observers as ‘bad taste’ (Lawler, 2005). Middle-class people can produce their selves in this way; as will be shown in chapter 8, people express this middle-class aesthetic in producing their accounts of happiness, by articulating ideas about large amounts of money being unnecessary for happiness. In some cases, disapproval or disgust is expressed toward
Psychoanalysis and the Self

Whilst many of the sociologists whose work is explored in this chapter see the constitution of the self to be closely related to society, culture and other people, psychoanalysts understand it as something that mediates between our outer and inner worlds. That is, psychic pleasure (and the repression of it) is central to selfhood, as are unconscious emotions and desires. Psychoanalysts therefore see there to be a tension and conflict between the repressed inner self and society.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, pioneered such thinking about the self. He suggests that a major aspect of it is the repressed unconscious (Freud, 2005). He concerned himself with the way in which culture and society placed restrictions upon sexual activity in the Victorian era, and with the neurotic behaviour that this brought about. These restrictions meant that for the self, unconscious desires, impulses and wishes were hidden away and not easily recalled. This, for Freud, was a means for the self to protect itself; one’s desires and wishes may conflict with that which is going on in reality, and this would bring about negative and intolerable emotions. Repressing these desires in such a restrictive society, then, would be a way to also repress negative feelings. There is thus a separation between the conscious and the unconscious mind, as well as a conflict between the two: unconscious desires for pleasure are equally as strong as the need for repression. This conflict can manifest itself in everyday life, such as in dreams and in slips of the tongue (Freud, 2005). The self for Freud is also bound up with family and childhood. Infants, when they are born, are wholly dependent upon their mothers for nourishment and survival. As

those who do equate money with happiness, as they are regarded as 'tasteless' (see Lawler, 2005).
the maternal body is their prime source of satisfaction, the mother-child relationship is also important for the development of sexual pleasure; this is part of what Freud called the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1999). Overall, Oedipal desires and unconscious impulses are paralleled by feelings of guilt, as the self struggles with adherence to society’s normative ideals and engagement with the social world. He also suggested that as culture progresses and becomes more complex, repression also strengthens, in particular, the repression of destructiveness and violence. This is a tendency that for Freud, is equally as prominent as the libido, or Eros, but both are repressed as culture becomes more advanced (Freud, 2002). He was not optimistic that the self would ever free itself from the demands of culture and social responsibility, and thus saw repression, conflict and ambivalence as fixed features of life.

Psychologist Erich Fromm also took inspiration from Freud’s psychoanalytic writings, in that he was also interested in the mediation between the individual psyche and society. He was concerned with – amongst other things - the way in which freedom, though one of the most central values or ideals of modern social life, poses a burden on the individual. Modern societies in this way may steep the self in feelings of isolation, powerlessness and insecurity (Fromm, 1942). Whilst medieval social systems were organised in such a way that everybody knew their place in society, and thus offered stability and relative security, the advent of capitalism, Fromm argued, instilled a feeling of uncertainty as each individual’s position depended purely upon their own personal effort. He likened this to the process of individuation that infants go through when they become independent from their mothers. He suggested that the seeking of guidance could be one way in which people may deal with these feelings, either through religion or otherwise. They may also adopt the beliefs and values of society and present these as their own, which would enable them to be exempt
from the free thinking that brings about such feelings. Lastly, he also suggested that people may strive for submission to or domination of another individual or object. These are both means by which one can alter their sense of self. By submitting to another person, an individual attempts to lose his or her self, as he or she attempts to become part of a larger, more powerful being; on the other hand, by dominating over a person, the self is strengthened (Fromm, 1942).

Happiness, then, can be considered an aspect of the self and identity, which in itself can be produced through therapeutic culture or discourse. However, it may also be seen as an emotion that can be ‘felt’ – often, but not always, on a short-term level. This will also be further explained in the analytic chapters of the thesis; moreover, literature from the sociology of emotions can illustrate ways in which emotions like happiness can be understood against a backdrop of culture.

The Sociology of Emotions

Sociological investigation of emotions has only emerged in the last thirty years or so; until the late 1970s, sociology as a discipline has generally dismissed emotion as antithetical to rational, calculated human behaviour. The study of “private, ‘irrational’ inner feelings” (Williams, 2001) was not considered to be a legitimate area of concern for sociology, where “the tendency has been to define human actors in largely ‘disembodied’ terms as rational agents who make choices based on ‘utility’ criteria” (Turner, 1991). Emotions were considered to be one of the aspects of human experience that is most private, and least subject to any control (Abu Lughod and Lutz, 1990). However, a rapidly growing body of literature now exists on the sociology of emotion, whereby scholars have demonstrated, via a number of approaches, the ways in which emotions can be shaped, experienced and
interpreted through social and cultural processes (Lupton, 1998). Indeed, Jonathan Turner and Jan Stets (2005) state that sociological theories of emotion emphasise:

"how emotions are, at one and the same time, constrained by situations, structures, and culture while being the very dynamic that makes face-to-face encounters, social structures and culture viable. Each theory enters this complex of interconnections among person, situation, structure and culture at a somewhat different point. As a result, each theory explains different dimensions of emotional dynamics." (2005:25)

Social anthropologist Clifford Geertz also highlighted the way in which emotions that are felt by a society's members are an product or an component of culture: “Not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artefacts.” (Geertz, 1973:81).

Despite this growing concern with the study of emotion, few, if any, sociologists working in this area have focused upon happiness. By way of example, the indexes of a number of key texts and edited collections on the sociology of emotion do not contain a single reference to happiness: Emotions: a social science reader (Greco and Stenner (eds), 2008), Emotions and Sociology (Barbalet (ed), 2002) and Emotions in Social Life (Bendelow and Williams (eds), 1998). Those that do contain references tend to point to brief, and often fleeting, appearances that appear as part of a wider discussion of emotion more generally (Lupton 1998, Turner and Stets 2005), rather than to more explicit discussion of the relationship between happiness and social or cultural processes. Nevertheless, the sociology of emotion as a body of literature provides a useful background against which happiness can be considered, and to which it can be applied.
Emotion and Classical Sociology

Although a sociology of emotion had not been established as a subdiscipline at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, some classical sociologists – in particular, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Georg Simmel – acknowledged the importance of emotion in their work, and went some way in identifying how different social structures or processes impacted on people's emotional experience. For Durkheim, emotion was bound up with social order; social solidarity in pre-modern societies was achieved via collective consciousness, which was often brought about by collective effervescence, that is, intense emotional arousal experienced at religious ritual gatherings in Totemistic societies (Durkheim, 1912/1961). In other words, emotion helped to maintain solidarity in pre-modern societies characterised by mechanical solidarity and there would have been a strong emotional reaction of anger and hostility from the rest of the group, or the collectivity, if such collective sentiments were violated. In modern, organic societies, Durkheim saw this effervescence to weaken, as the division of labour became more specialised and society became more fragmented. He highlighted a potentiality for this to be replaced with a feeling of anomie, or normlessness.

For Georg Simmel, on the other hand, emotion was linked to social action. As metropolitan societies changed and advanced with the onset of modernity, the rapidly changing sensory stimuli bring about a 'blase attitude', whereby people stop reacting to such changes, and that gradually erodes their emotional vitality (Simmel, 1903).

Max Weber's approach to emotion was more ambivalent. In one sense, he recognised its importance; he identified 'affectual action' as one type of social action that was driven by people's emotional states - although this also occupied a lesser status than 'rational action'
(Shilling, 2002) which he saw to really be at the heart of modern societies, and which he saw as antithetical to emotion (Weber, 1978). For Weber, there was little room for emotion in modern rational societies, and, rather pessimistically, he identified a process of 'disenchantment'. It could be argued that theorists such as Weber, along with the Enlightenment, whereby science, objectivity and rationality were valued far above that of emotion and superstition, saw the start of an expulsion of emotions from sociology. Indeed, as discussed above, it was not until the 1970s that a sociology of emotion started to re-emerge.

There are a number of theoretical approaches within the sociology of emotions, each highlighting different angles from which the relationship between culture and emotional experience can be examined. A few of these will now be discussed in turn, and such factors will be considered in relation to happiness; the first to be examined is the dramaturgical approach.

**The Dramaturgical approach to emotion**

Dramaturgical theories see social behaviour as a dramatic presentation, in which actors (or individuals) are governed by a cultural script. This script includes ideologies and social norms and rules; in the case of emotion, such scripts prescribe the ways in which particular emotions ought to be experienced and expressed. If ever rules are broken, individuals may lose face and attempt to make up for or repair the breach, either by making some kind of apology, or in some other way (Goffman 1959, 1967).

Erving Goffman pioneered the dramaturgical approach in sociology more generally (1959, 1967), in which he developed a theory of social interaction on a micro-level whereby
individuals seek to present their selves to others in a way that accords with cultural norms, values and expectations (Goffman, 1959). Although he did not study emotions in depth, he did write about embarrassment, and suggested that it comes about when an event occurs that leads an individual to display *inappropriate* behaviour or characteristics for the situation they are in, that is, that which does not accord with the norms or expectations of the situation (Goffman, 1956).

One of the most eminent proponents of this approach is Arlie Russell Hochschild (1979, 1983, 1998), who developed many of Goffman’s ideas. As discussed above, Hochschild states that culture-specific norms that are present in a society govern how an individual ‘should’ feel in different circumstances (that is, a feeling that is ‘appropriate’ to the situation). She calls these norms ‘feeling rules’ which are “the social guidelines that direct how we want to try and feel” (1979:563); these rules play a major role in the ‘culture of emotion’ (1998:7) found in each society. Similarly, Hildred Geertz (1959) explains what is meant by a culture’s ‘vocabulary of emotion’:

“every cultural system includes patterned ideas regarding certain interpersonal relationships and certain affective states, which represent a selection from the entire potential range of interpersonal and emotional experiences.” (1959:225)

Indeed, this idea can be applied to happiness, inasmuch as norms and rules exist in relation to the display and feeling of happiness: an example of a feeling rule from contemporary Western culture is the norm that one ‘ought to’ feel happy on their wedding day. Hochschild seeks to find out how these feeling rules are manifested in everyday life, and identifies so-called ‘rule reminders’ that serve this purpose. These are often observed in everyday conversation in the form of ‘rights’ or ‘duties’. For example, in some situations, one could
say that they have the ‘right’ to feel a certain amount of anger at someone, or they ‘should’ feel very guilty (this would be more of a duty). The use of ‘rights’ and ‘duties’ in referring to feeling rules helps to specify the extent, the direction and the duration of the feeling that ‘should’ be felt in a given situation. But a question remains; what happens if there is a discrepancy or dissonance between what an individual actually feels and what the feeling rule ‘prescribes’ for a given situation? Hochschild states that “the individual often works on inducing or inhibiting feelings so as to render them “appropriate” to a situation.” (1979:551). She calls this act of inducement or inhibition ‘emotion work’ or ‘emotion management’. This inducement, or evocation, which is one type of emotion management, is concerned with bringing about a desired feeling that is not there; inhibition, or suppression, the second type of emotion management, refers to the stifling of undesired feeling that is there. She also highlights three different techniques of emotion work that individuals may engage in separately or simultaneously; cognitive, where one attempts to change their thoughts so as to also alter emotional states they associate with these thoughts; bodily, where emotion work seeks to change physiological aspects of emotion (such as slowing down one’s breathing, or purposely becoming intoxicated with drugs to heighten one’s mood) and lastly expressive, which involves the inducement or suppression of expressive gestures, such as making oneself smile, or trying not to cry.

The Managed Heart (1983), possibly Hochschild’s most groundbreaking study (and one of the most major empirical studies in the sociology of emotions more generally) looked at the emotion management undertaken by airline cabin crew staff in the early 1980s. This occurred when interacting socially with one another, and more importantly, their passengers. Staff were trained and socialised to appear happy and friendly at all times during this interaction, irrespective of what they actually felt, in order to maintain a positive image.
of the airline they worked for. Thus, she also went as far as saying that emotion work can be
'sold for a wage'. Emotion work:

“requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward
countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others ... This kind of labour
calls for the coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of
self that we honour as deep and integral to our individuality ... Emotional labour ... is
sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value.” (Hochschild, 1983:7)

In both commercial and everyday settings, emotion management can be carried out either
by ‘surface acting’, where the individual consciously pretends to feel a more socially
‘appropriate’ emotion (for example, trying to feel grateful for something), or by ‘deep
acting’, in which the individual changes their feeling without thinking about it. So, in the case
of Hochschild’s airline cabin crew staff, ‘deep acting’ may have been undertaken more often,
as appearing cheerful would have been a ‘natural’ part of the job role. In either case,
emotion management may or may not be successful. Others might perceive ‘surface acting’
as ‘false’, or the individual may be unable to adequately adopt or suppress the (un)desired
feeling. Even if an attempt is unsuccessful, the fact that it was made in the first place
suggests the importance of the presence of feeling rules. Moreover, when feeling rules are
broken there are costs of varying nature.

Therefore culturally prescribed feeling rules and emotion management that may be
undertaken as a result of such rules can strongly shape what people feel and when and how
intensely they feel it; this can very often apply to the feeling and expression of happiness,
whether it may be genuine or ‘managed’. Not only can feeling rules constrain when, how
and why happiness is experienced or displayed (for example, it is very appropriate at a
wedding, but may be very inappropriate at a funeral), but they are also *produced* or created by people themselves, and it is their subsequent widespread use that renders them part of a normative framework within which happiness is located and experienced by individuals.

**A Symbolic Interactionist approach**

This approach focuses on the self and identity as the main force affecting emotional experience. One proponent of this approach, Susan Shott (1979), highlights the way in which people are socialised emotionally; this results in emotional experience varying according to culture. She embraces Hochschild’s notions of cultural feeling rules and emotion management, and argues that “there is a social framework that modifies the actor’s experience, interpretation and expression of emotion.” (1979:1320). She also looks at the way in which actors construct their emotions; these constructions are affected by actors’ definitions of the situation. That is to say, physiological arousal can only be seen as an emotion when a definition or interpretation has been attached to it. This process of definition takes place within the framework of cultural norms, or feeling rules. This also has implications for the interpretation of survey data (particularly cross-cultural or cross-national data) on happiness. If respondents define happiness in different ways according to cultural norms, the meaning of the data would surely differ across cultures. Shott also discusses the way in which ‘role-taking emotions’ facilitate social control. She uses the term ‘role-taking emotions’ to refer to those that involve “putting oneself in another’s position and taking that person’s perspective.” (1979:1323). Examples of such emotions are embarrassment, shame and guilt and all of these involve the actor reflecting on how they come across to others. These three emotions can act as negative sanctions for deviant behaviour. For example, embarrassment occurs when an actor realises that others might view his self-presentation as ‘inept’ (see Goffman, 1956). Even if embarrassment is felt when the
individual is alone, the thought of what others would have thought had they been present is enough to trigger the emotion. Shott argues that these types of emotion provide motivation for normative and moral conduct, as most individuals would want to avoid feeling such negative emotions if possible. However, this argument could also be extended to claim that the presence of feeling rules for all emotions can facilitate normative conduct; without such rules, societies could find themselves in some kind of 'emotional chaos'. Again then, this chapter draws attention to the centrality of culture to people’s emotional experiences. Whilst happiness may or may not facilitate social control (as is discussed briefly in the first part of this chapter), it is still important to bear in mind that it is actors (or individuals) themselves who produce the discourses and culture that places such interpretations and meanings on different emotions in this way.

**The Interaction Ritual approach to emotion**

Interaction Ritual theories stem from Emile Durkheim’s examination of collective emotional experiences in the religious gatherings of Australian aboriginals. Gene Fisher and Kyum Chon (1989) review Durkheim’s writings, stating that he “has been called the “architect” of the social constructionist approach to emotions” (1989:1). Here, they focus on the place of emotions in his theory of social solidarity; like Hochschild, Durkheim identifies emotion norms that a society’s members adhere to. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912/1961), Durkheim focuses on religious gatherings or assemblies, and the way in which emotional arousal at these gatherings contributes to collective unity and the creation of human society. He uses the Australian aboriginal tribe, the Warramunga, as an example; all involved in their religious ceremony experience high levels of excitement, or ‘collective effervescence’. Such gatherings, with this collective emotional experience, Durkheim claimed, were the source of the sacred. Although members of the group connected this
emotion to their 'totem' (religious symbol), he asserted that the sacred was actually the
group or society itself. It was through this emotional experience that social solidarity was
maintained. Emotion helped to maintain solidarity in societies characterised by mechanical
solidarity as there would have been a strong emotional reaction of anger and hostility from
the rest of the group, or the collectivity, if such collective sentiments were violated. This is
also the case for societies characterised by organic solidarity; because of social
differentiation and a rapidly changing social environment, a wider variety of emotions
emerge. These societies are more fragmented than those with mechanical solidarity;
however, it could be said that certain emotions are felt in certain situations (the presence of
feeling rules would ensure this), and that those displaying 'inappropriate' emotion would
face varying costs. Thus, solidarity can be maintained as long as emotional 'norms' are
present. Durkheim states that: "...society exercises a moral pressure over its members, to
put their sentiments in harmony with the situation." (1912/1961:445). This ties in with
Hochschild's notion of feeling rules; members of the same groups are likely to feel similar
emotions in the same situations. This is because definitions of situations are produced by
members of the group, or the society, and thus it is people themselves who create feeling
rules and culture that are the backdrop to their own emotional experiences.

Again, then, emotions such as happiness are far from individual in nature; instead, the
culture (whether that is definitions of situations, feeling rules, or discourses that are
available with which everyday experience can be made sense of and articulated) to which
people belong and that people themselves produce, is the medium through which
experiences of happiness are articulated. This is another factor that may be overlooked by
the economics of happiness.
Macrosociological approaches to emotion

Jack Barbalet (1998) takes a macrosociological approach to emotion, that is to say, his analysis is concerned with emotions felt by subpopulations of a society. For him, an emotion is a physiological state that can sometimes turn into a conscious feeling but can also remain unconscious. Whether conscious or not, he argues that certain emotions, particularly confidence, resentment, shame, vengefulness and fear are differentially distributed across subgroups of society that possess differing levels of power and prestige. Resentment, for instance, may be felt when changes occur in social structure, for example, when there is a redistribution of power in a society. Others may react to this by collectively feeling resentment, particularly if those who have gained power have gained at their expense. On the other hand, positive emotions can also be differentially distributed – those with power and material resources may feel a collective sense of confidence if they see their future as being more certain than those with less power. Whilst the differential distribution of happiness is not considered by Barbalet, the likelihood that this is the case is very high; are those with more power or status happier than those with less? Are men or women happier? Are the middle classes happier than the working classes? Are people who live in certain parts of the country happier than others? Not only could happiness levels differ by subgroup, but members of each group may produce their accounts of happiness in different ways. Might members of certain groups be more likely to position themselves in therapeutic discourse and offer narratives of suffering than others? And can all members of society, in situating themselves in such a discourse, strive successfully to be autonomous individuals who seeks personal fulfilment, with the capacity to do so via acts of choice? Or are some more well-positioned to do so than others? This will be further explored, with particular reference to social class, in Chapter 8 of this thesis.
Theodore Kemper (1984) also takes a macrosociological approach to emotion, by suggesting that emotions can result from power and status relations that exist between people (or actors), whether these are real, anticipated or imagined. He argues that relationships are structured by power and status, whereby one actor can achieve their will despite resistance from the other, and therefore any changes in social relations between such actors would be a result of changes in their power and status positions. Thus, emotions that are felt by actors can be understood in relation to their positions in this way. For instance, individuals who have or gain power within a social relationship may experience positive emotions, such as satisfaction or confidence; however, the loss of power may lead to a subsequent loss of confidence, or other negative emotions such as anxiety (Kemper, 1984). An actor who gains status may similarly experience satisfaction or well-being, and may also direct this toward those who accorded them status. However, a loss of status, according to Kemper, may result in negative feelings of shame or embarrassment, particularly if the individual feels that they caused this loss themselves. If they perceive the behaviour of others as the cause of the loss of status, they may feel anger towards them. Kemper also suggests that social solidarity can emerge in situations where actors accord power and status to one another, as both givers and receivers of status are likely to feel satisfied, with givers also being accorded gratitude by receivers; however, loss of status could also result in an erosion of this solidarity (Kemper, 1984).

Thus, Kemper's theory could also be applied to happiness; indeed, it offers an explanation of how positive emotions arise within social situations (although he concentrates more on satisfaction than on happiness per se). What kinds of situations are likely to bring about happiness? People may be more likely to describe feeling happier when they are accorded
Emotion and Gender

A growing body of literature also exists on emotion and gender, and, more specifically, on the differential emotional experiences of males and females. Sociologist Deborah Lupton has written on this topic (Lupton, 1998); she refers to distinctions that are often made between the ways in which women and men experience and express emotion, and highlights the dominant cultural notions of the 'emotional woman' and the 'unemotional man'. These notions parallel the distinction that is often drawn in sociology between the public and private spheres of social life, whereby the public sphere and the world of work has traditionally been associated with men, and the home, or the private sphere, with women. It is in the latter sphere that there is more 'open' emotional expression and relaxation of emotional management (which may be done more at work and in the public sphere – see Hochschild, 1983) and it is therefore in this way that women are often considered to be more 'emotional'. Emotionality, according to Lupton, is culturally coded as 'feminine', whilst rationality, or lack of emotionality are dominantly represented as 'masculine'. Indeed, feminist Alison Jaggar (1989) has pointed out that "..not only has reason been contrasted with emotion, but it has also been associated with the mental, the cultural, the universal, the public, and the male, whereas emotion has been associated with the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular, the private, and, of course, the female." (1989: 145).

More generally, dominant ideals of femininity are such that women are expected to display gentleness, to be willing and able to express feelings to others and to understand and be empathetic to the feelings of others.
Men, on the other hand, are often considered to be 'unemotional' (Lupton, 1998). Whilst they have traditionally been seen to be more rational, controlled and perhaps better suited to the public sphere, they have also – at a time when more positive emphasis is being placed on emotional expression – been labelled as emotionally sterile and lacking in self-awareness. Victor Seidler (1991) suggests that men often lack access to the discourses that allow them to become more emotional, as they have been socialised into and exposed to more dominant forms of masculinity: "We were brought up to kill our feelings at an early age, so that we could survive as men. Often this means that as men we do not know what we feel. We do not have the words to express what is happening to us, nor a sense of how our emotional and personal lives have been disorganised." (Seidler, 1991: 37). Anthony Giddens, in his writings on the 'pure relationship' (1992), which is a 'relationship of equals' from which each person benefits from the other, also comments on the ways in which men lack the 'emotional' qualities that many women have. He writes that in the pure relationship, "a relation of equals, organised through emotional communication coupled to self-understanding, becomes possible [...] Individuals who are at home with their own emotions, and able to sympathize with those of others, are likely to be more effective and engaged citizens than those who lack such qualities." (Giddens, 1994:193). For Giddens, women are more likely to possess these qualities than men.

However, these arguments are all based on hegemonic or traditionally dominant discourses on gender that have operated in society (Lupton, 1998). It could be that these discourses of gender are now being contested and that new ones are emerging; Lupton suggests that the emotional styles of males and females may be converging, and that we are witnessing a 'feminisation of masculine emotionality' (Lupton, 1998:131). This has paralleled a wider change in the way in which talking about feelings and emotionality has been represented:
whilst emotionality may sometimes continue to be seen as a more feminine trait, it is now seen as superior, rather than inferior, to rationality, reason and control (Craib, 1994). Men are thus now encouraged to express their emotions to others.

Whilst literature on men's and women's expression of happiness does not exist at present, the notions of the 'emotional woman', 'unemotional man' and the 'feminisation of masculine emotionality' may indeed be relevant to this study. Do men and women give accounts of their experiences of happiness in different ways? If not, is this because their emotional styles really have converged? Again, this will be explored further in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

**Emotion and Discourse**

This thesis seeks to examine the dominant discourses that people use when giving accounts of happiness. In a similar vein, Deborah Lupton (1998) has investigated – through the analysis of interviews with forty-one Australian men and women - the ways in which people employed dominant discourses in their accounts of emotion. She identified a range of discourses relating to the ontology of emotion and its conceptualisation in terms of selfhood, and others concerning the way in which emotion is generated. The first set that was identified concerned the way in which emotion is defined. The dominant discourses replayed in relation to this were: emotion seen as a means of self-expression; emotions being signals (to oneself or others) of how one is feeling; emotions as means of self-authenticity (or of being 'true' to oneself); emotions as a personal resource (with which life can be enjoyed and appreciated); and emotions as the seat of humanity, and which distinguish humans from other animals and inanimate objects (Lupton, 1998). People also described emotional expression as something 'natural', and as something whose source is
inside the human body or self; generally, it was considered preferable for emotions to be expressed, rather than for them to be kept 'within' the body, as the control of emotions in this way was perceived as 'inauthentic', less 'honest' and artificial. Another set of dominant discourses that Lupton identified were characterised by the idea that emotion is fluid, and that the body acts as a kind of 'container' for it. A binary opposition was established in relation to this, whereby for a 'dry' person, emotion is held inside the body, and for a 'wet' or 'gushy' person, it is allowed to flow from it. The idea of 'bottling up' emotions (in the body) in order to keep them under control was also a dominant one. Lastly, a temperature metaphor was also widely employed by people; in other words, someone who expresses their emotions freely is likely to be described as 'warm', or 'hot-tempered', whilst someone who does not may be described as 'cold', or 'cold hearted'. Heat was also employed as a metaphor for anger, again, in relation to the idea that the body is a container for the emotions. For example, the terms 'seething with rage', 'stewing' and 'simmering' all relate to the boiling of liquids (Lupton 1998, Lakoff 1987).

Undertaking an examination of the dominant discourses within which people situate themselves when giving accounts in this way is fundamental to this study of happiness. Indeed, emotions such as happiness "are not simply 'felt' as internal states provoked by the unconscious sense of a lost infantile satisfaction – they are actively structured and understood through culturally specific discourses." (Jackson, 1999:119). It is this model which this thesis seeks to adopt.

**Sociology of Emotions theories: key to understanding happiness?**

Are sociology of emotions theories useful for understanding happiness through a sociological lens? As mentioned previously, few, if any, studies that have been undertaken
within the subdiscipline of the sociology of emotions have explicitly centred on happiness. And, as also argued above, happiness, whilst considered an emotion, is not only this, but is also an aspect of the self and identity that can be produced via discourse.

However, these caveats notwithstanding, sociology of emotions theories can nevertheless highlight some of the ways in which our subjective and emotional experiences are channelled and understood through culture, and can – in most circumstances – be applied to happiness. Although they cannot solely be used to account for or explain the relationship between happiness, culture and discourse (for reasons outlined in the above paragraph), they can do so in tandem with the literature on the therapeutic turn explored in the first half of this chapter, thus capturing the dual nature of happiness as both an aspect of the self and an emotion.

Such factors are also central to a qualitative, sociological understanding of happiness but are nevertheless overlooked by economists who study happiness trends via survey measures. As mentioned above, eliciting information about these kinds of social phenomena may be better suited to a qualitative method like the in-depth interview than statistical methods. Indeed, the survey approach may also be ill-placed for finding out why some subgroups of the population may produce their accounts of happiness in a different way from others.

Are these ideas useful in building up a cultural understanding of happiness and the discourses around it? It could be argued that some of these theories, whilst making relevant points, are rather deterministic. For example, are people always going to feel particular emotions in given social circumstances? What if they do not? And are people always going to engage in emotion management if their feelings do not conform to feeling rules? Might they
decide not to? Some could also be said to be too general; no attempt has been made to apply such theories to happiness in particular, which suggests that a more specific socio-cultural explanation of happiness may be necessary. Nevertheless, and as mentioned above, these ideas are still useful for illustrating the way in which culture is a key aspect of subjective experience, and they can be used in tandem with those around discourse and therapy culture to create an understanding of the ways in which subjective processes (and our articulation of them) are subject to cultural forces, and also of the ways in which we produce the very culture that they are subject to (and, in turn, produce our accounts of the experience of them).

Concluding Comments

This chapter has thus demonstrated, through discussion of studies and work from a number of bodies of sociological literature, that culture — whether in the form of discourse, modes of personhood, social norms or interpretations — is absolutely central to an understanding of people's experiences and perceptions of happiness. This culture, and these different components of it, is simultaneously created by people and then used to produce their accounts of happiness, and shapes people's experiences and perceptions in order that these conform to normative frameworks that exist as part of culture. It is in this way that people then use discourse to make sense of and articulate their experiences of happiness. The analytic chapters of the thesis will show in much more detail how this has come through in the accounts of the respondents that took part in this study.

So what can such an understanding of culture and discourse offer to the economics of happiness explored in chapter 2? And in what way can it be used to interrogate the determinants or causes of happiness that it has put forward? As has been shown above,
much of the statistical analysis of happiness data that has been undertaken by scholars working in this area does not and cannot lend itself to the analysis of the use of discourse and the everyday experience of happiness in this way. Therefore, qualitative methods need to be employed in order that data on these can be yielded. It is only through such methods of research that an understanding of the use of discourse in relation to each of Layard's 'Big Seven' determinants can be gained.

The following chapter sets out the methodological framework for this study; this will be followed by the analytic sections of the thesis, in which the relevance of discourse in each of these areas will be explored in far more depth.
Chapter 4
Methodology

How do people use discourse in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness in contemporary Britain? And how can some of the assumptions that underpin social scientific work on the measurement of happiness be problematised through such an understanding of the use of discourse? A qualitative method of data collection was employed to address these central research questions of the thesis; semi-structured interviews were carried out with twenty-six British adults, in which data were collected on their experiences and perceptions of happiness.

Qualitative Interviews

This study is guided by an interpretive constructionist approach; that is, the research is primarily concerned with the meanings and ideas that people use to make sense of their social worlds (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The main focus of the thesis is people's experiences and perceptions of happiness, and the way in which discourse is used to produce accounts of these. It was thus appropriate to adopt such an approach, the tenets of which are concerned with people's shared interpretations of phenomena (such as happiness), and the socio-cultural sources of these. An interpretive constructionist approach seeks to build understandings of social phenomena based on the specific meanings people attribute to them, and the way in which these meanings then become shared (Berger and Luckmann 1967, Gergen 1999, Gubrium and Holstein 1997). I have thus sought to understand, via the examination of people's accounts of their perceptions and experiences of happiness, how these are produced through the use of discourse; it is hoped that this will shed some light on the way in which happiness is socially constructed. Additionally, I have also sought to
investigate the way in which such an understanding of the way in which happiness relates to discourse and culture more generally can enable an interrogation of some of the assumptions and key tenets of the body of work that is the economics of happiness.

It was decided that qualitative interviews were to be used as this seemed to be the optimum method with which to collect data on people's experiences and perceptions of happiness. The sole use of quantitative, or statistical methods, whilst often useful for the collection and analysis of attitudinal data and measures of happiness, would not have allowed a sufficient level of detail for this purpose; whilst happiness can be and has been measured in this way by many social scientists who adopt a positivist approach, the experiences and perceptions of happiness that the research question of this thesis is concerned with would be better examined via qualitative methods, and more specifically, via people's narratives and talk. Accounts of such detail are necessary in order that the relationship between happiness and discourse is examined. For instance, how might people make sense of their experiences of happiness? Is it considered to be an individual, 'internal' experience, like that advocated by therapeutic discourse, or that which is derived from 'external' factors such as money or interpersonal relationships? A qualitative method whereby accounts and narratives are offered - and indeed, an interpretive constructionist approach that is concerned with the meanings and interpretations by which people understand happiness - is more appropriate for such an investigation.

Qualitative interviews in particular were chosen, as whilst the analysis of print media (such as popular magazines and newspapers) and television broadcasts would have provided some insight into people's conceptions of happiness in popular discourse, qualitative interviews were better placed and more appropriate for offering detailed accounts of many aspects of
people's lived experiences and perceptions of happiness (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To date, very little qualitative research into happiness has been done in sociology; indeed, whilst there exists a large and expanding literature on its measurement and its determinants using quantitative approaches, like that of the economics of happiness, the presence of qualitative studies of the essence and subjective experience of happiness remains rather scarce. Qualitative work such as this could help to complement that which has already been done; it offers an understanding of the socially constructed nature of the 'happiness' that has been measured and a socio-cultural backdrop against which the determinants and ratings of happiness are understood can be provided. This thesis sheds light upon the way in which happiness is experienced and made sense of in relation to the determinants and ratings that these other studies have highlighted.

**Pilot Study**

Four pilot interviews were undertaken prior to the start of the main data collection process. These formed an important part of the research process as they allowed me to collect preliminary data whilst testing the adequacy of the research instrument (that is, the interview schedule) as well as developing it (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2004). In other words, they gave me an opportunity to ascertain whether the questions that were designed for and featured on the initial draft interview schedule – which comprised ten questions - elicited the kind of information that I required to address the research question of the thesis (for the full pilot interview schedule, see Appendix 1). A number of questions were found to be inadequate in this way, inasmuch as the responses they elicited did not relate closely to the research question; instances such as this allowed me to reflect back on the research instrument and amend particular items accordingly. This will be discussed in more detail later in this section.
The pilot study allowed me to reflect not just upon the research instrument but also upon my own interviewing techniques. In particular, it gave me the opportunity to learn how to probe respondents in order to get the most relevant responses; for instance, on several occasions, some respondents began to talk about topics that were not relevant to the subject of the interview. When this occurred, I was able to probe them with a further question that elicited information of a more appropriate nature. There was also one question on the pilot interview schedule that two of the four respondents failed to understand; they misinterpreted ‘do you think that the idea of ‘happiness’ might have changed over time or over history?’ and provided answers that pertained to the way in which people may be more or less happy now than in the past. Whilst responses of this nature did actually prove useful in the subsequent analyses, in circumstances where this was misinterpreted, I changed the wording of the question to ‘do you think that people have always defined happiness in the same way over time or history?’ in order that their responses were more applicable to the original question.

Respondents for the pilot study were obtained through my personal contacts, and two older people (Helen, aged seventy-seven and Maureen, aged eighty) and two younger people (Sophie, aged twenty-two and Alex, aged twenty-five) were recruited. I assigned each of them a pseudonym, so as to ensure their anonymity in the study; pseudonyms were also assigned to all respondents who took part in the main data collection process. The questions in the pilot interview schedule focused largely on people’s experiences of happiness and unhappiness. The respondents were firstly asked the question ‘what makes you most happy in life?’. It was felt that this was a straightforward way of allowing them to begin thinking about how they experience happiness. Indeed, they all answered this question with little
difficulty, and this was retained as the opening question on the interview guide for the main data collection phase. They were also asked whether they felt happy at the time of the interview, and why or why not. Again, responses to this question provided useful insights into the way in which they used discourse in producing these accounts of their experiences of happiness and unhappiness, and it was thus retained in the main interview schedule. They were then asked to describe times in their lives when they had previously felt happy or unhappy. Whilst these also provided insights into their use of culture in producing their accounts, asking for such accounts of past happiness and unhappiness were not considered to be of any further value once accounts of present happiness had been asked for. That is to say, responses to all of these questions tended to be rather similar, and in recounting specific events, each of the four respondents placed more emphasis on the detail of the events than on their experiences of happiness per se. Thus, it was decided that the question on current experiences of happiness would be retained (indeed, in answering this question, many respondents also talked about past experience), but that those emphasising life events would be discarded. In addition to such questions on life events, the pilot study's respondents were also asked questions on how they might have coped with the unhappy events that they experienced; it was hoped that this would yield information on people's uses of therapeutics or 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988) in order to bring about contentment. However, this question was also discarded; the responses that it elicited tended to focus upon unhappiness more so than happiness, and it was decided that instead, respondents taking part in the main data collection phase would be asked a question on their views and perceptions of the therapy industry (in particular, talking therapies and anti-depressant use). A question of this nature was felt to be more applicable and relevant to their use of therapeutic discourse, inasmuch as it enabled investigation into the extent to
which they expressed positive perceptions of therapeutics specifically, when drawing upon therapeutic cultural discourse in articulating their experiences.

The respondents who took part in the pilot study were also asked a number of questions pertaining to their perceptions of happiness. They were asked ‘what do you think happiness is?’ Although one participant stated that this was a difficult question to answer (as did a small number of people in the main sample), and all four took a few moments to think about their answers, they were all able to provide responses. The information given in response to this question provided insights into the ways in which people saw happiness to be experienced, and the extent to which they felt that it was an individual-level experience, which demonstrated their use of therapeutic discourse. This question was therefore retained, and remained on the main interview schedule. Three more perception-orientated questions followed this one: ‘do you think that everybody wants to be happy, or might it be different for different people?’, ‘do you think that the idea of happiness might have changed over time or over history?’ and ‘do you think the idea of happiness might be different across cultures?’. All three elicited useful information about the way in which people perceive and define happiness, and were also retained in the main data collection process, despite the second of the three questions being re-worded in some cases (see above).

Thus, the Pilot Study allowed for the testing of and some reflection upon the research instrument (interview schedule) that was designed. Whilst it was decided that some of the questions would remain in the interview schedule in the main data collection process, it was felt that some — which elicited less ‘useful’ responses — ought to be discarded and a number of new questions added (these will be discussed in more depth in the following section). Indeed, I also reflected upon the research instrument throughout the data collection...
process, altering, omitting or adding questions as appropriate (this will also be explored further in the next section). The four respondents were asked to provide me as the researcher with feedback at the end of their interviews on their experience, and what they felt were the good and bad points of the interview. These comments also informed some of the amendments that were made to the instrument. It was decided that further questions concerning people’s reflections upon and perceptions of the idea of happiness were to be added, in order to elicit responses that would provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which discourse is used when doing so. Thus, the interview guide for the main data collection process was extended to eighteen questions, the details of which will be discussed below. The pilot study was a valuable part of the research process as it provided an opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between the research instrument (and individual questions within this) and the overall objectives of the research, in order that the instrument was refined as appropriate.

Data Collection

A further twenty-two adults were interviewed during the main data collection phase and the four pilot interviews were also included in the subsequent analysis, taking the total sample size to twenty-six (see Appendix 2 for a table containing demographic details for each respondent). The only criterion for inclusion in the sample was that participants were required to be able to reflect upon their experiences of and ideas about happiness. Whilst I could not necessarily determine that they could do this prior to the actual interviews, all were able to do so. I sought adults of any age, gender, ethnic background or sexual orientation. Thus, respondents were all over eighteen; the youngest was twenty-two and the eldest was eighty. Thirteen were male and thirteen were female, and they came from a range of educational and occupational backgrounds. Fourteen were in paid employment,
Two were self-employed, five were retired, one was a homemaker and the remaining four were unemployed. All were white, with the exception of one respondent who was black-Afro-Caribbean. Three male respondents identified as being gay, and it was inferred from the interview data that the rest of the sample were heterosexual. The respondents were recruited via advertising in my London neighbourhood and snowballing through personal contacts. Only participants with whom I was unacquainted were recruited; interviewing friends, relatives or colleagues may have resulted in the respondents feeling uncomfortable with regard to divulging information of a potentially sensitive and personal nature to a personal acquaintance. Each participant was offered a monetary incentive of fifteen pounds in return for their time. Most of the interviews took place in the respondents’ homes, with the exception of five, which took place at the respondents’ place of work, at their request, and all lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours. Each respondent was assigned a pseudonym in order that they remained anonymous, and these were used to identify respondents in the analysis of the interviews.

The recruitment of respondents was a largely straightforward process. Advertising simply requested volunteers who were willing to be interviewed on the general topic of ‘happiness’ and their everyday lives. Females were generally easier to recruit than males; the majority of people who responded to the advertisements were women. It is open to question whether women are simply more likely to respond to such requests, or whether the act of talking to someone about their emotional experiences is something that appeals more to females. However, I did require an equal number of male and female respondents; I was interested in the way in which people of both genders used discourse in producing their accounts of happiness, and felt that having an equal number of each would help to yield more valid
results. More male respondents thus needed to be recruited through snowballing, via either existing respondents or my own personal contacts.

Once they had agreed to be interviewed, a convenient time and place was arranged with each respondent. Prior to the start of each interview, respondents were given an Information Sheet and a Consent Form to read through (see Appendices 3 and 4 for copies of these). After agreeing to proceed and signing the Consent Form, each respondent was given a short questionnaire to complete, in which demographic details (age, sex, educational background, employment status and occupation) were given. Nineteen of the twenty-six respondents were also asked to provide an overall happiness rating on an eleven-point scale, like that asked in national and cross-national happiness surveys; the decision to ask respondents this question was only taken after the pilot interviews and the first three main interviews had been carried out. They did so in response to the following question:

"Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are, 0 being extremely unhappy and 10 being extremely happy?" (Please ring as appropriate)

Figure 4.1: Global happiness question as asked in the European Social Survey (ESS)

I initially decided to ask respondents this question because I felt that it was an additional and alternative way of allowing them to reflect on both their experiences and perceptions of happiness. Whilst it provided insights into the ways in which people might attempt to
quantify or rate their happiness, I decided after the data had been collected that they were not as useful as I had initially thought; they did not appear to add anything extra to the interview data, and responses to the question ‘do you feel happy at the moment?’ that featured in the interview schedule were sufficient in yielding information on people’s happiness levels.

All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder, and were afterwards transcribed. The interview schedule comprised eighteen questions (see Appendix 5). Respondents were asked about their own experiences of happiness; they were asked about what makes them happy in life and whether they felt happy at the time of the interview (and why or why not), as was asked of the pilot study respondents. They were also asked about what might have made them feel happier at that point in time. In asking these questions, I was not interested in what makes people happy and how happy they might be per se; instead, I used these questions to elicit information from respondents about how they experience happiness in their everyday lives, in relation to things that make them happy and to their present circumstances. I then sought to analyse the way in which they may have situated themselves within a range of cultural discourses when talking about the sources of their happiness, and their current life circumstances that may or may not be making them happy. They were also asked about their perceptions of happiness; as well as those asked in the Pilot Study (see above for questions pertaining to perceptions of happiness), they were asked whether they felt that happiness is a shorter-term emotion or a longer-lasting state, and whether money, interpersonal relationships, intimacy, good health and employment were necessary for a happy life. They were also given the opportunity to talk about their views on the use of therapeutics (such as talking therapies and anti-depressants). The idea that happiness could be something transitory rather than longer-lasting, and the idea that it is often experienced
in relation to these aforementioned factors were issues that arose in the Pilot Study; all four respondents emphasised these. I thus wanted to explore the ways in which other respondents might have perceived these issues in relation to happiness, and sought to explore the way in which discourses were used to produce their accounts of their perceptions of these. I also felt that it would be important to get an understanding of respondents’ views of therapeutics; would use of therapeutic discourse be necessarily accompanied by positive attitudes toward them?

Answers to questions were generally long and in-depth; the accounts that respondents gave were largely about everyday subjective and emotional experiences in which they shared many commonalities. However, they also had a richness that was explored and carefully unpicked in the analytic stage of the research process.

The interviews were semi-structured, and therefore the questions in the interview schedule loosely determined what respondents talked about. However, this was not always adhered to rigidly; participants’ answers were free-flowing and in responding to particular questions, they often began to talk about additional issues that I then probed them about. For instance, one stated that he felt a sense of guilt about admitting to feeling unhappy with his life, which he was then asked to elaborate upon, whilst others were asked to talk in more depth about their relationships with their children. Some respondents also inadvertently gave answers to questions that were part of the interview schedule, but that had not yet been asked. Thus, in this sense, the interviews partially resembled a ‘guided conversation’ (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews were similar to everyday conversations in many ways, as I often asked respondents spontaneously to elaborate on things that they talked about, and often nodded and ‘agreed’ with them to indicate understanding of what they said. However,
the interviews were ‘guided’ in that the respondents were required to talk about specific topics and the questions I asked them enabled them to do this (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

**Self-Reflection and Reflexivity**

Reflexivity has been an important part of the research process, and self-reflection has been particularly fundamental. Reflexivity has been important in terms of the way in which it has enabled me to have an awareness of the social conditions and environment within which the research and the interviews have taken place (Bourdieu, 1996). I have also, throughout the research process, reflected upon the role that I as a researcher have played in producing knowledge (and indeed, in its co-production along with respondents) (Hammersley 2004, Finlay 2002). Thus, whilst the respondents provided the interview data in the form of accounts of their experiences and their perceptions, the effect that I as the interviewer had on the nature of the data must also be considered. What kind of role might I have played in producing this knowledge?

One way in which this can be considered is via epistemological reflexivity, or the way in which I arrived at my specific research question and the methods and conclusions drawn from this (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). What assumptions are implicated in the theories and methods that have underpinned my research and in the questions I have asked respondents (and thus affecting the responses I have been given)? These issues will be explored further in the following section of this chapter, entitled Epistemological Reflexivity.

I have also considered the way in which the research relationship between each of my respondents and myself as a researcher may have been characterised by inequality, or asymmetry, due to the interviews being conducted on my terms, and comprising questions
that I had selected and designed. Furthermore, asymmetry may also have been present as I – again, as the interviewer – may have possessed greater cultural capital than each of the respondents (Bourdieu, 1996), in the form of sociological knowledge that I brought to the analyses of their accounts. Bourdieu also warns of a distance that can form between the respondent's perception of the objective of the research and the researcher's perception, which may be brought about by this asymmetry. I was thus aware of this, and attempted to reduce it, mainly by 'active and methodical listening'. In other words, full attention was paid to each respondent and his or her narrative and I attempted to understand their points of view, expressing agreement with them on occasion. I also attempted to mentally put myself in the place of each respondent (Bourdieu, 1996); prior to each interview, I engaged in conversation with them in order to better acquaint myself with them, and as each interview progressed, I was able to develop an understanding of who they were and what kind of trajectory their lives had taken and slightly adapt interview questions accordingly. This ensured that respondents felt at ease with what they were being asked to do.

However, consideration has also been given to the ways in which the personal characteristics of respondents might have impacted upon my interviewing method and the responses I thus received, as well as to the way in which my own characteristics might have impacted upon their answers. For instance, one question that featured in the interview guide was 'do you think that sexual relationships are an important aspect of a happy life?'. When beginning the data collection process, I felt slightly reluctant to ask some respondents this question; in particular, I wondered whether some older respondents might feel uncomfortable with talking to a younger person such as myself about their intimate lives. Indeed, a small number of respondents did not offer elaborate responses to this question when initially asked (which may have been for this reason), and in one earlier interview, I
chose not to probe them further, in fear of causing the respondent to feel embarrassed. In subsequent interviews, however, I ensured that I did probe them in a way that minimized embarrassment, in order that richer data on the perceived relationship between happiness and intimacy was gained.

I made sure to undertake a degree of ‘emotion work’ (Hochschild, 1983) during my interviews, as I was aware that my own mood at the time (whether positive or negative) might have impacted upon participants’ responses. A cheerful demeanor was necessary in order to make them feel at ease and willing to talk, and this was what was generally adopted. Even when I arrived several minutes late at the home of one respondent after having some difficulty in locating their flat, I ensured that I masked my feelings of frustration with ‘happy’ and friendly expression. However, it has been borne in mind that any emotions that I may have displayed to respondents could have affected their responses. For example, three respondents talked about occasions in the past where they had taken recreational drugs such as ecstasy, and the positive emotions that they had taken from this. As someone who is not a drug user and who is aware of the dangers of them, I ensured that I retained a neutral facial expression (as opposed to anything that might have expressed sadness or disapproval), in order that these respondents felt comfortable talking about these experiences. I also had to make an ethical decision in these instances in which these respondents had confessed to committing a criminal offence; rather than reporting their narcotic activities to the police, which may have caused them harm (see discussion of this in ‘Ethical Considerations’ section), I made the decision to respect the rights and privacy of these individuals and the confidentiality of the information that they had provided over the offences to which they had confessed.
Certain aspects of the interview situation might also have impacted upon the responses that participants gave and the data that I gathered. Firstly, I have considered the effects of my own personal characteristics on this (see Kreuter, 2008, for further discussion of interviewer effects). As a female interviewer, might male and female respondents have responded to me differently? Overall, this did not appear to be the case; however, two slightly more 'difficult' interviews, where respondents seemed less willing to talk and where less rich data was offered, were both with male respondents. All of the females, on the other hand, were able to talk more freely about their experiences and perceptions. However, whether this is because these women felt particularly comfortable talking to another female, or because they are generally more comfortable with talking about their subjective experiences and feelings than men are, is open to question. The effect of my age has also been considered. Being in my twenties, might older respondents have perceived me differently, knowing that I have had less 'life experience'? Conversely, might respondents of a similar age to myself have talked more freely, as I would have been likely to have been of a similar age to their friends to whom they talk regularly? Indeed, one respondent, Chloe, who was the same age as me, told me at the end of the interview that she had really enjoyed it, as she had felt as though she had spent the hour and a half talking to a friend (despite the fact that she and I had not met prior to that occasion). She also said that the topics covered in the interview were similar to those that she frequently talks to her friends about. However, despite the fact that none of the older respondents felt this, the majority of them also talked openly and freely, and many also expressed that they had found the interview experience enjoyable; indeed, Sophie (22, Female) even described talking to me about her happy and unhappy experiences as 'therapeutic'. This resonates with what Bourdieu called 'joy of expression' (1996: 24).
In one other case, Laurence (65, Male), who was gay and who was recruited from the LGBT social group of which he is a member, asked me of my sexual orientation, and expressed slight concern that I could have been homophobic. Indeed, Laurence did admit to feeling nervous during the interview – about both inviting a relative stranger into his home and about the possibility that I could have been ‘anti-gay’, and I thus reassured him that whilst I am heterosexual, this was certainly not the case. Whilst he claimed to feel less nervous thereafter and appeared to talk freely during the remainder of the interview, this occurrence is an illustration of the way in which the interview situation can often be an intrusion on the part of the interviewer who is asking a number of things of the respondent (Bourdieu, 1996), and it therefore must be borne in mind that the relationship between the researcher and respondent ought to be managed carefully. The respondent’s perception of the interviewer may impact upon responses given; whilst Laurence did provide long and relevant answers to the questions he was asked, his nervousness would almost certainly have impacted upon these and this must be taken into account.

The physical location of the interview could also have affected the data generated. Most interviews took place in respondents’ homes; however, five took place at the respondents’ places of work, in areas that were free from interruption from customers or colleagues. It is possible that had these five respondents also been interviewed in their own homes, they could have felt more at ease with talking about their subjective experiences, as the potential of being interrupted or overheard by colleagues or others with whom respondents had a ‘professional’ relationship would have been minimised. However, it is not possible to know whether this would have been the case; these respondents all seemed able to talk relatively freely, and I felt that an appropriate level of depth was achieved.
The data that were gathered during the interview process comprise ordinary accounts of everyday experiences and perceptions of happiness; many of these accounts described feelings and experiences that I (and indeed, many other researchers if in this position) was able to identify with from my own everyday life, outside of research. This has had implications for self-reflection (which I will discuss in this section), epistemological reflexivity and for data analysis (which will each be discussed in the proceeding two sections). Many of the respondents' accounts of their experiences of happiness were situations that I was able to personally identify with from my own everyday life, and I also understood many of their perceptions of happiness that they described. Moreover, acknowledgement must be made that whilst I am a researcher, I am also a member of British society, just as the respondents are, and I am thus likely to experience similar feelings of happiness in particular circumstances, and may use the same discourses in articulating these. Nevertheless, at the analytic stage, the data were treated as unusual and questionable, and underlying assumptions were explored and unpicked.

Epistemological Reflexivity

What assumptions are implicated in the methods that have underpinned my research and in the questions I have asked respondents (and thus affecting the responses I have been given)? This is the main question that epistemological reflexivity is concerned with.

This thesis takes an interpretive constructionist approach; as discussed at the start of this chapter, it investigates people's experiences and perceptions of happiness, and the way in which discourse has been used by people to produce shared meanings, interpretations and accounts of it (Berger & Luckmann 1967, Gergen 1999). Thus, one fundamental assumption is that people construct their own 'stories' or accounts of happiness, which they use to
express and enact their experiences and perceptions of it, and it is an understanding of these stories and accounts that is the aim of this thesis. Indeed, it is stories and narrative (and their deconstruction) that many see to lie at the heart of the sociological enterprise (Plummer, 1995). However, gaining an understanding of such stories or accounts via the qualitative interview method means that rather than attempting to prove anything per se, the thesis seeks to describe the phenomena that are being researched. In other words, rather than taking the positivist stance of proving a definitive presence and impact of culture on discourses of happiness, where culture may exist outside of individuals and have agency of its own, this qualitative, phenomenological approach seeks to describe and chart the way in which it is interpreted, drawn upon, utilised and ultimately produced by this particular group of people (Becker 1996, Rubin & Rubin 2005). As described above, the accounts given by participants in response to the questions that they were asked were that of everyday, taken-for-granted experience. That is to say that the knowledge that these interviews have generated was not novel in itself, but this thesis has provided a sociological and cultural lens with which ordinary, taken-for-granted and somewhat commonplace subjective feelings, experiences and processes have been examined.

In many instances, respondents’ accounts contained confusion and contradiction. For instance, whilst many respondents described happiness as something that is internal and that which is experienced at the level of the individual, they also emphasised that close relationships with others was one of the most fundamental factors for a happy life. This has been accounted for in the analysis of the data collected; such contradictions are simply factors that contribute to the complex make-up of people’s experiences and perceptions of happiness. Such contradictions have also been acknowledged as an inevitable part of qualitative research (Latour, 1987).
Qualitative interviews were used in undertaking this empirical research because it was felt that this was the most appropriate method with which to investigate people's experiences and perceptions of happiness. Whilst quantitative methods may have been chosen if the focus of the research had been the measurement of happiness rather than the experience of it, it was felt that this was the optimum and most appropriate method in this case.

**Data Analysis**

A phenomenological approach was taken to the analysis of the interview data, as its main focus was people's experiences, understandings and perceptions of happiness. The idea of 'voice' was important at this point; that is, both myself as the researcher and the respondents had voices that have been presented in the analysis; however, it is the responsibility of myself as the researcher and my interpretation of the data to represent the voices of the respondents, and for their voices to come to the fore here (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002). It is important that the respondents' voices are not overshadowed by that of the researcher (Darlington & Scott, 2002).

I transcribed all of the interviews myself; whilst this was quite time-consuming, it was a useful process in that it facilitated a strong acquaintance with the data. Once this was done, and the data collection phase finished, I initially decided to use software package NVivo to code the data; however, a number of technical difficulties were encountered with this, and I thus decided soon after that the data could simply be coded by hand, using a carefully constructed numerical-code system.
Thus, the data were analysed using an inductive approach; the data were coded and a number of analytic themes were generated (Silverman, 2005). Themes began to emerge during the data collection phase; similarities between different respondents’ accounts had arisen, and this thus facilitated faster and easier generation of these themes at the coding stage of the research.

Coding and generation of themes was done in three stages, similar to that outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). First, the data were examined and initial categories were created (‘open coding’). Each category was then developed further into a ‘theme’, within which sub-categories emerged (‘axial coding’). Lastly, the themes were integrated and arranged into a specific order (‘selective coding’); this was then used as a framework for the four analysis chapters of the thesis, which fit together to form an overall ‘story’ of people’s use of discourse in talking about their experiences and perceptions of happiness.

Thus, what were the themes and categories that were generated? Table 4.1 below provides an overview of these; however, they will also be explained in further detail here. The first to be created related to what people considered happiness to be, and is represented in the analysis chapter entitled What is Happiness? (Chapter 5). Six sub-categories were identified in relation to this, which loosely correspond to the discourses that were used. The first was the way in which respondents described happiness as something elusive, or something that is difficult to define and understand. It was made sense of by some as something that is ‘hidden’ within one’s self, and suggestion was made that a better knowledge of one’s self might lead to a furthered knowledge of one’s happiness. The second category related to the way in which people understood happiness to be a unique experience, that is, one which is different for each individual, often depending on one’s specific personality.
Table 4.1: Overview of analytic themes and their sub-categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Theme</th>
<th>What is Happiness?</th>
<th>Therapeutic Discourse</th>
<th>Interpersonal Relationships and Happiness</th>
<th>Orientations to Money, Working Life &amp; Happiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-categories</strong></td>
<td>Happiness is elusive</td>
<td>Negative attitudes toward therapy industry</td>
<td>(Un)importance of a happy society</td>
<td>Materialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happiness is unique</td>
<td>Happiness experienced at level of individual</td>
<td>Importance of social relationships</td>
<td>Fulfilling Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happiness is natural/biological</td>
<td>‘Working’ on the self</td>
<td>Being in love</td>
<td>Work and unhappiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happiness requires positive thinking</td>
<td>‘Knowing’ oneself</td>
<td>Sexual relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happiness is transient</td>
<td>Introspection in everyday life events</td>
<td>Absence of relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happiness is invariant across time and space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, happiness was described as something that is 'natural', or something that is produced from within one’s body. Many people thus expressed negative attitudes toward the increasing reliance upon therapeutics and anti-depressants for the altering of one's emotional and subjective state as they saw these to be ‘unnatural’. Related to this was the idea that happiness is a matter of biology, or that it was a ‘physical sensation’ (as one respondent said). People also talked about the way in which happiness is achieved by ‘positive thinking’ and they expressed an undesirability of persistent unhappiness. Conversely, however, they also made sense of happiness as transient, highlighting the
inevitability of negative emotional experience in life, and thus also emphasising an
undesirability toward the display of persistent *happiness*. Lastly, people talked about the
way in which the essence of happiness has remained the same over both time and space;
whilst the determinants of happiness may differ, happiness itself would never change
because of its 'natural' properties. Thus, each of these sub-categories are set out in Chapter 5 and are made sense of as different discourses of happiness within which people situate themselves when producing their accounts of their *perceptions* of happiness. Each is considered in conjunction with culture more generally; how is each culturally-rooted discourse utilised by respondents in constructing their accounts? Do people’s accounts revolve specifically around the idea of happiness as an individual-level experience? Why has this particular conception of happiness emerged in this way?

The second theme, therapeutic discourse (set out in Chapter 6: *The Happy Self: understanding happiness via therapeutic discourse*), was concerned with a more explicit linkage between happiness and therapeutic culture, which was introduced in Chapter 2, and focused upon the way in which people draw upon ‘therapeutic discourse’ in their accounts of their *experiences* of happiness. This theme contained five sub-categories. The first related to the way in which – despite the overwhelmingly strong use by respondents of therapeutic discourse to make sense of their happiness – people expressed negative attitudes toward the therapy industry (both talking therapies and anti-depressant use). Why did this contradiction arise? The next category was concerned with the assertion by respondents that happiness is something that is experienced at the level of the individual; they expressed this by talking about its ‘internal’ nature (thus overlapping with some of the themes in the preceding chapter). Next were the categories of ‘working’ on and ‘knowing’ the self. Both of these concepts, which are concerned with the way in which people talk about their self as a
separate entity to them as individuals, and are central components of therapeutic discourse, were used by many respondents to describe the way in which they managed their own happiness. The last category, introspection in everyday life events, related to the way in which many respondents described adverse, or unhappy life events in a particularly introspective and psychological way, using terms such as 'trauma' and 'panic'. Again, making sense of events in this way is a central precept of therapeutic discourse, which is what people are shown to use in their accounts.

Interpersonal relationships and happiness was the next theme. This was concerned with the way in which the majority of respondents talked about the way in which interpersonal relationships were fundamental for a happy life; this appeared to contradict the previous two themes, and looked to oppose the idea that people use therapeutic discourse to articulate their experiences and perceptions of happiness, as here, being with others was considered to be central to happiness rather than being an individual. Why did respondents provide contradictory accounts in this way? This theme also comprised five categories. The first was concerned with the idea that one should be happy when the rest of society or the world is happy, though only a small number of respondents expressed this. Next was the importance that people placed on social relationships in general; every single respondent talked about this in some way. The next two categories were concerned with the emphasis placed by respondents upon being in love and sexual relationships, and the importance of each of these for a happy life. The last category relates to the way in which people described the negative feelings that they experienced when such interpersonal relationships were absent. Thus, if, according to the first two themes, happiness was something considered as very individual and self-orientated, why were relationships also deemed so important? How do such 'sociality' discourses interact with the idea of therapeutic culture?
The last theme was Orientations to Money, Working life and Happiness, which focused upon the ways in which people perceive the role of money and wealth in their experiences of happiness, as well as the ways in which they draw happiness (or indeed, unhappiness) from their working lives. This theme comprised three categories. The first was Materialism; how did people situate themselves in discourses around the relationship between desire for money or wealth and happiness? How and why might 'non-materialistic' selves be produced? In what way does this relate to a classed aesthetic and the production of a middle-class self? And how might social class compete with therapeutic discourse in people’s production of their accounts of happiness here? The next two categories were concerned with the happiness and unhappiness that people drew from their working lives; discourses of fulfilment and achievement were of particular focus here. How do such discourses intersect with therapeutic discourse? In what ways did people use discourse to construct accounts of a lack of fulfilment at work?

As discussed in the previous two sections on reflexivity, the data that the interviews generated were concerned with everyday, taken-for-granted feelings; the accounts given by respondents described ordinary, everyday subjective experiences that are widely understood by many. Thus, the data were carefully analysed, and – as Woolgar (1988) has stated – an ‘ethnography of the text’ was undertaken. In other words, these ordinary accounts were transformed into an informative analysis that has shed light upon the nature of people’s experiences and accounts of happiness, and has gone some way to shed light upon the social construction of happiness in western society.

Ethical Considerations
This research aims to achieve a high ethical standard. In undertaking this empirical work, the British Sociological Association’s Statement of Ethical Practice has been adhered to (British Sociological Association, 2010). As this research has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), I have also abided by their Research Ethics Framework and their six key principles (Economic and Social Research Council, 2010). The way(s) in which each was adhered to in this research are considered below:

1. *Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality and transparency.*

Ethical approval was sought for the research, prior to the start of the fieldwork process. Approval was obtained from the University of Surrey Ethics Committee and each respondent was informed of this prior to the start of his or her interview. The interview guide and accompanying questionnaire were examined by the committee and approved for their integrity, quality and transparency.

2. *Research staff and participants must normally be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved.*

Research staff were not employed for the undertaking of this research. However, each participant was presented with an Information Sheet (shown in Appendix 3) that they read prior to start of his or her interview. Here, they were informed about what their participation entailed and what the research was to be used for. They were also informed that they were able to withdraw from the interview at any time if they wished. The
interviews did not proceed until they stated that they fully understood this. They thus gave their informed consent by signing a Consent Form at this time (see Appendix 4 for these). A full Risk Assessment was also carried out and presented to the University Ethics Committee in the obtaining of ethical approval; a small number of risks were identified, the main one being the potentiality of emotional distress that respondents may experience when being asked questions about their personal lives. These risks were explicitly set out in the Information Sheet and all respondents were made aware of these.

3. The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected.

The respondents' anonymity and the confidentiality of the information that they supplied were both ensured, and respondents were informed of this verbally and via the Information Sheet prior to their interviews. Each respondent was also given a pseudonym, by which their information is communicated in the thesis, to ensure anonymity.

4. Research participants must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion.

All respondents took part in the research voluntarily; each was given the opportunity to ask me any further questions and to consider participation after reading the Information Sheet, and they were not asked to provide their informed consent (by signing the Consent Form) until they agreed to take part. They were also reassured – both verbally and via the Information Sheet – that participation is voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time if they did not wish to continue.
5. *Harm to research participants must be avoided in all instances.*

No harm was done to any of the respondents; care was taken to ensure that interviews did not take place in locations where the potentiality of this was increased. One potential risk of the research was that of respondents becoming emotionally distressed after being asked personal questions; however, I was prepared to stop interviews in this eventuality (and in practice, this did not happen).

6. *The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit.*

The research does not contain any conflicts of interest and is impartial and independent. Its key aim is to be a contribution to knowledge. This was made explicit on the Information Sheet.

**Conclusion**

Using the qualitative interview method has facilitated the generation of rich, in depth data with which people's experiences and perceptions of happiness have been explored. The data have been analysed in a way in which the use of discourse in the production of accounts of such experiences and perceptions has been described and charted.

The knowledge that has been produced by the research can thus be used to contribute to the currently scarce but growing literature on the sociology of happiness; it provides a unique, qualitative account of the understanding of people's experiences and perceptions of
happiness, which complements — and can also be used to interrogate — the work on its measurement and determinants that has been undertaken thus far.

The proceeding part of this thesis is the analysis of the interview data collected. Chapters 5 and 6 focus more generally upon respondents' accounts of their perceptions and their experiences of happiness respectively. Chapter 5 explores the ways in which people articulate what they think happiness is, and the ways in which they position themselves in a number of different discourses when doing so. It demonstrates how people characterise happiness as immune and resistant to social factors, and simultaneously as being located within a complex normative framework in which there exists cultural guidelines on the way in which happiness ought to be displayed and experienced. Chapter 6 then goes on to examine people's utilisation of therapeutic discourse in producing their accounts, and charts the way in which people understand their experiences of happiness as being individualised, internal and self-orientated in nature. It explores people's use of the ideas of 'work' on the self and self-knowledge (which are key tenets of therapy culture) in making sense of their experiences of happiness and unhappiness.

Chapters 7 and 8 then move on to address the ways in which the determinants of happiness that have been highlighted and emphasised by economists can be interrogated within such a discourse-oriented framework. Chapter 7 takes the factors of family relationships, friends and community, and explores respondents' accounts of their experiences of these, and their perceptions of the importance of them for a 'happy' life. Whilst they all emerged as highly important for almost all respondents, the chapter also acknowledges the way in which discourses around relationships may compete with therapeutic discourses in people's accounts of happiness; its characterisation as individual and internal can be shown to be less
straightforward than initially assumed. Chapter 8 then interrogates the determinants of financial situation and working life. Like in Chapter 7, it explores people’s accounts of the happiness and unhappiness experienced in these areas of life, and their perceptions of their importance for happy life. Additionally, it considers social class as a factor that may compete with therapeutic discourse in these accounts: how might a middle class aesthetic be brought out in the articulation of perceptions of money’s diminished importance for happiness? It is to the analytic part of this study to which the thesis will now turn.
Chapter 5
What is Happiness?

Much of the existing social scientific work that has been undertaken on happiness is laden with assumptions around its measurement and its determinants. In particular, economist Richard Layard has suggested that — through an analysis of American social survey data – interpersonal relationships, working life, one’s financial situation and personal freedom are four of its most important causes (2005: 63). This has also been echoed by a number of other economists of happiness. However, before undertaking an interrogation of these assumptions, a qualitative analysis must be done of how people understand happiness. Gaining an understanding of this plays a fundamental role in the way in which we can obtain an insight into the way in which people use discourse in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness. Such an insight and understanding can then enable a problematisation of some of the assumptions that underpin work in economics, as it identifies dimensions of happiness that such work does not account for.

An understanding of people’s experiences and perceptions of happiness makes a valuable contribution to sociological thought; it resonates with current debates in policy-making and academic literature around whether happiness should be used as the milestone of societal progress, rather than economic growth. If it is to be considered as the main guiding principle of social life and yardstick for the monitoring of societal progress, then it is imperative to have an understanding and acknowledgment of the way that people experience and make sense of it.

So what do people say that happiness is? How do people organise their individual experiences of it? And how do they situate themselves within particular discourses of
happiness? This chapter seeks to provide an answer to the question 'what is happiness?'; a sociological understanding of what people think it is is key in making sense of its social construction.

All of the respondents I talked to in this study reflected upon what they think happiness is; this will be explored in this chapter through a number of different themes that have been drawn from the data.

**The Elusiveness of Happiness**

The idea that there is no straightforward, clear-cut way in which happiness can be defined was explicitly highlighted by some respondents, who expressed that it might be the case that many people may not fully understand what happiness is and therefore would not know whether they felt happy or not; in other words, happiness is something elusive. Indeed, this is a discourse within which people have also been shown to position themselves in relation to love, which is commonly described as difficult to understand, and “resistant to descriptive language” (Johnson, 2005:25). As Beth commented:

Beth (23, Female): I don’t know if everyone has the right idea of what happiness is, either. Like, if you think about relationships and things like that, some people think that a particular person would make them happy, but they’re actually not happy. But they hang onto it, because they think that it makes them happy. But I don’t think they’re right. So, like, all the people you’re interviewing for this, they’re probably not right about their answers to the questions. Like, even me, when you ask me, what makes me happy, I probably haven’t given you the right answer, because I don’t even know if we know.
She felt that many people are unaware of their own happiness and of what makes them happy, which suggests that it is considered a ‘truth’ that needs to be unveiled or unleashed. That is to say, it is something ‘real’ about which there exists a ‘right idea’, and is therefore something that is seen to exist within everyone. The suggestion that people may not have the ‘right idea’ of what happiness is implies that everyone has some idea of happiness, even if it may be ‘incorrect’. This therefore indicates that everyone possesses a capability of experiencing happiness, even if this ‘blindness’ to it is also universal.

Nick also expressed that happiness might be something elusive:

Nick (25, Male): Most people don’t know what makes them happy, I think. I think most people aren’t honest with themselves, the subconscious and denial is a very powerful factor, I think most people use that most of the time.

Like Beth, he also claimed that knowledge of happiness is something that is unknown by the majority of people; however, drawing upon psychological language, he used the ideas of the ‘subconscious’ and ‘denial’ to explain this. He also utilised the metaphor of the self being a kind of ‘container’ for emotion (Lupton, 1998), by suggesting that happiness is something ‘real’ that is hidden within one’s self, but needs to be extracted from the unconscious. Nick also suggested that people might have a better understanding of their own happiness if they were ‘honest with themselves’; that is to say that whilst a degree of personal reflection and ‘work’ on oneself may be required from any individual who wishes to further this understanding, happiness could again be considered to be something that everyone has ‘within themselves’ but that needs to be unveiled from underneath this ‘denial’, possibly with the assistance of some kind of psychological ‘sophistication’ or ‘expertise’, as Martin suggested:
Martin (32, Male): I guess it takes a certain level of sophistication psychologically to reach a state where you’re actually aware of your own happiness. Some people are just very basic and they just eat, sleep, shit, work and that’s about it, they probably don’t ask themselves many questions.

For Martin, anyone who does not ‘ask themselves questions’ is ‘very basic’, and thus less sophisticated, which suggests a desirability of ‘knowing oneself’ (by asking questions). Knowing oneself would provide an individual with an increased awareness of their happiness. Indeed, many self-help texts advocate the idea that it is self-knowledge that ‘good selves’ ought to strive toward, and that asking oneself questions is a key route to self-improvement (Rimke, 2000). Therefore to situate oneself in this discourse of elusiveness would somewhat allow one to reflect and self-actualise, in order that such an awareness is gained.

Thus, it appears that happiness, like love, is “knowable only intuitively, at the level of feeling.” (Jackson, 1999:100). Indeed, one reason for the dearth of happiness research within sociology may be that happiness is considered to be an elusive emotion, state or process, that which is experienced at the level of the nervous system, which sits outside of the scope of sociological inquiry. However, it is clear here that the idea of happiness being elusive is, in itself, central to the way in which people interpret and articulate it, and is one of the dominant discourses within which people situate themselves when making sense of what happiness ‘is’.

Why is happiness understood by people to be something that needs to be ‘unearthed’ from the unconscious? Why do people situate themselves within this discourse of elusiveness?
This could be because actual feelings and experiences of happiness take place corporeally, at the level of the nervous system (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011) and are thus often difficult to reconcile with the 'outside', material world, despite the fact that happiness is also something inherently social and cultural, both in terms of its construction and the way in which it is experienced.

Despite this commonly held idea that happiness is something elusive and obscured by the unconscious, most people did not appear to find it difficult - when asked - to talk about where they derive their happiness from; many of them identified common factors such as friends, family, working life and being in love (factors that have also been highlighted by other social scientists such as Layard (2005) as being important determinants of happiness). Thus, if happiness is something so elusive, how were they able to offer such responses? Very few, if any respondents claimed psychological 'expertise' in achieving awareness of their happiness; on the other hand, the fact that many of them identified common sources of happiness, such as friends and family, may suggest that attributing happiness to these may simply be dominant discourses that they were replaying.. In the same way, describing happiness as something elusive can also be considered a dominant cultural discourse with which it can be made sense of, and it is this idea of elusiveness that is of fundamental importance for the contemporary social construction of happiness. People may indeed know what makes them happy, yet nevertheless make sense of it in this way because of the corporeal, embodied nature of the way in which it is experienced.

'Natural' happiness?

The idea that happiness is something 'natural' – and therefore asocial, like with the discourse of elusiveness - also featured heavily in many people's reflections upon what
happiness is. The idea of 'naturalness', which points to the way in which happiness is seen to come from within the body, also parallels a dominant discourse around love, which is commonly understood to be a universal property of human existence (Johnson, 2005). For example, Lizzie (25, Female) described the way in which a number of social changes that have taken place over the last few hundred years, such as the rise of consumerism, may have contributed to the way in which definitions of happiness might have altered, but that "the way that you feel inside... of happiness... that wouldn't have changed. That's just a natural feeling that you get from inside yourself." An internality is highlighted in relation to happiness here; again, this idea can be related to metaphor of the body or self as a container for happiness, that is, something inside which happiness 'exists' (Lupton, 1998). Further, for Lizzie, as well as for a number of other respondents, the naturalness of happiness renders it immune or resistant to such wider social change, which is another dominant discourse that has been found to surround definitions of love (Johnson, 2005). The extent to which people feel that happiness might have changed over time or across cultures, and similarities with discourses of love in this respect will be examined further in a later section of this chapter.

A discourse of naturalness was also evident with regard to the way in which respondents talked about their views on the use in the West today of 'artificial' means of achieving happiness (that is, talking therapies, anti-depressants and drugs and alcohol). Many expressed negative sentiments toward this, perceiving each of these to be inferior to more 'genuine' experiences of happiness that one should take from 'within oneself', and which are therefore 'natural'. This suggests that there may also be a moral framework underpinning the notion, as drawing happiness from such means is not considered 'right'.
Mark, who had suffered with depression in the past and who had previously taken a course of anti-depressants, felt that such medication is over-prescribed, or 'prescribed willy-nilly':

Mark (41, Male): Anti-depressants are prescribed too often. Anti-depressants are for seriological imbalances and stuff like that, if they're going to be given to people with chemical imbalances, that's fine. Anti-depressants that are prescribed willy-nilly, which they frequently are, because my cat's just got run over, and my partner's having an affair, and I've just been made redundant, and I feel miserable... oh, here, take these, they'll make you feel better... I'm sorry, no. I think they're over-prescribed.

The need to take medication for such seemingly 'mundane' events such as the death of one's pet is something that Mark felt was unnecessary. This resonates with Rose's idea that "therapeutics has subjectified the mundane." (1996:158), and how everyday life experiences such as debt, marriage, divorce and childbirth have been transformed into emotion-laden 'life events' for which 'coping', 'adjustment', and even medication are required. However, Mark suggested that people who do not have a chemical imbalance, or who are not 'really' depressed ought not to take medication when experiencing such events, thus implying that they should be capable of regaining their happiness 'naturally' rather than artificially (that is, with the assistance of drugs). Others, like Alan, also suggested that emotions are 'natural' aspects of human existence, and therefore attempting to modify emotional experience with 'chemicals' is seemingly undesirable. He felt that to do such a thing is not necessary if one is simply feeling 'a bit fed up', but that instead, 'the condition of human emotion' is something that should exist in and of itself.

Alan (48, Male): I don't think necessarily that the condition of human emotion needs to be medicated for... just because you might be getting a bit fed up, doesn't mean to say you
should run off to the doctor and say 'excuse me, I'm getting a bit fed up at the moment, can I have a pill to make me not feel fed up?' You know, some happy pills.

Sophie felt that when dealing with adverse events, 'you've got to do things for yourself', rather than rely on any external sources:

Sophie (22, Female): I think people can rely on these things as well. You know, like how people rely on other drugs, and alcohol. It can become a thing that they can't live without. Which I don't think is very good. You know, some people, they can't... like Amy Winehouse, she can't give a performance without alcohol. She can't survive without it... But I think people have to learn how to survive without... help. Because I think in order to overcome things, you've got to do things for yourself, you've got to say 'this is me, take it or leave it. I'm going to do everything I can to change my life'. Because only you can change your life. People can help you, they could lend you money, or they could give you advice. But at the end of the day, it's only you that can make a change.

Again, Sophie's claims that 'people have to learn how to survive without help' and that 'only you can change your life' can be linked to the idea that happiness is considered to be something natural, or something that an individual ought to have within him or herself. In other words, happiness for Sophie is not something that one can be given by anyone or anything else, but rather one should be able to come to terms with who they are without any kind of aid or assistance (by saying 'this is me, take it or leave it'). In this account, Sophie situates herself not only within a discourse of naturalness, but also within a therapeutic discourse. Taking responsibility for one's own happiness in this way, and engaging in techniques in order to improve one's life are intimately bound up with the concept of 'working' on the self, 'caring' for the self (Foucault, 1988), and with therapeutic discourse, which these concepts are aspects of. Self-sufficiency, in this way is also something that is
championed by self-help literature, whereby the importance of both relying on oneself throughout one’s life, as well as “forming a healthy relationship with the self” (Hazleden, 2003:421) is emphasised. Indeed, Sophie’s account echoes advice offered to self-help author Melody Beattie’s readers: “Self-care is an attitude toward ourselves and our lives that says, I am responsible for myself...[...] I am responsible for how much I enjoy life, for how much pleasure I find in daily activities... My decisions will take into account my responsibilities to myself.” (Beattie, 1992:114).

Thus, the discourse of the naturalness of happiness gives rise to the idea that it is one’s own personal responsibility to change their life and to find a solution to problems, and that dependency on sources external to oneself is undesirable. Again, this resonates with the ‘enterprise culture’ of neoliberal societies, wherein individuals who are able to care for and take responsibility for themselves are well-placed to be ‘effective’ citizens who are then able to govern themselves (Rose 1996, Rimke 2000; see chapter 3 for further discussion). In this case, then, if one were to gain happiness from an external source, taking responsibility for maintaining it thereafter would be more problematic than if they had found it ‘within themselves’.

**Biological discourse of happiness**

Related both to the idea that happiness is natural as well as to its embodied nature (as discussed in the above section on elusiveness) is the way in which some respondents situated themselves within a **biological** discourse of happiness, that is, attributing it to biological or chemical processes such as the release of endorphins or serotonin. As with the discourses of naturalness and elusiveness, a biological discourse has also been shown to be a dominant discourse within which people situate themselves in relation to their perceptions...
of love. In this case, love is also made sense of as a chemical reaction to another person (Johnson, 2005).

Mark described happiness as ‘a chemical’, and Martin commented on how he feels when exposed to sunlight and attributed this to vitamin intake:

_**LH: What do you think happiness actually is?**_

Mark (41, Male): [long pause] I think physiologically it’s a chemical... erm... it’s serotonin, isn’t it...

Martin (32, Male): ...happiness is a physical sensation as well. Like, two weeks ago when the sun was out for once in a while, I sat on the balcony for four hours and after that, I felt so good. ‘Cos for the first time in half a year I got Vitamin D in me. [...] I tend to have a biological opinion of what makes you happy.

This suggests that for both Mark and Martin, as long as an individual had some intake of Vitamin D or release of serotonin, the idea that happiness ‘is a physical sensation’ means that they could experience happiness irrespective of any social circumstances that they may be in, and also suggests that happiness is natural, or something that is derived from within the individual. Again, then, the idea that the body is a container for one’s happiness (Lupton, 1998) is utilised here. At another point in the interview, Martin also told me that he had wondered whether he suffered from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), with which he experienced feelings of depression in winter months when exposed to fewer hours of sunlight. This is also a common discourse drawn upon in contemporary society, particularly as we witness an increasing popularity of the use of ‘light-boxes’, which people use to simulate sunlight in order to combat feelings of depression that they feel are brought about
by prolonged periods of darkness. The idea that we should feel happier when exposed to
more sunlight (which a number of respondents emphasised) is linked to scientific evidence
that exposure to bright light increases levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin in the brain
(Leppamaki et al 2002, Lumie 2010), and it is evidence of this nature which has been
produced by scientific professionals, that is drawn upon here.

Whilst people make sense of and describe happiness as innate and individually and internally
felt, it could also be said that these corporeal feelings are socially ordered and are given
some kind of cultural meaning and significance, and are thus drawn upon in the form of a
discourse with which to make sense of them.

Such a biological discourse of happiness appears to run counter to that of naturalness
explored above. Is reliance upon sunlight and vitamin intake for one’s happiness not
comparable to relying upon other ‘external’ sources such as drugs, alcohol or therapists?
Whilst negative sentiments were expressed, as has been seen, by many respondents toward
the use of these, they did not seem to express the same negativity toward requiring sunlight
and vitamins for experiences of happiness. On the other hand, conceiving of happiness as a
‘physical sensation’ does indeed relate to the idea that it is something natural, and internal
to one’s self, and the idea that we ought to take responsibility for our own happiness could
still apply here; whilst it would be harder to take responsibility for one’s emotional state if
the weather were bad, as this is something that we as individuals have no control over,
‘solutions’ to this, such as the purchase of a ‘light box’, or taking holidays to destinations
with more sun exposure were highlighted as potential ways in which to do so. Thus,
positioning oneself in biological discourse would still allow people to be proactive in
attempting to manage their happiness. It seems that here then, people are drawing upon
scientific knowledge related to serotonin and vitamin intake in order to then situate themselves within this biological discourse of happiness, and that the fact that such information has been properly 'evidenced' by qualified 'experts' (scientists) such as Leppamaki et al (2002) may give it heightened cultural and social importance and credibility.

Thus, in reflecting upon the idea of happiness through a framework of biological discourse, one would acknowledge happiness as a feeling that pre-exists the selves that experience it; it is something brought about by chemical and biological processes. However, in understanding happiness through discourse as sociologists, happiness itself is produced through the language and discourse that are used in making sense of it.

Unique feelings

Another common idea expressed by a number of people is that which is that happiness is something individual and unique. In other words, happiness was seen to be something that each individual would experience differently, and that it is manifested through one's personality and plays a key role in the way in which one constructs and reconstructs their personal identity. This was expressed by many respondents, despite the fact that many of their accounts of and reflections upon the idea of happiness shared many similarities. Alan, for example, described the way in which his 'version' of happiness is probably unique and different to anyone else's:

Alan (48, Male): I would imagine it's radically different in some cases, I would think there'd be a broad spectrum, I wouldn't necessarily say my version of happiness is... replicable... or applicable to other people.
He suggested that there is a 'broad spectrum' of different variations of happiness, on which his version would feature. People may situate themselves within such a discourse because happiness is something that is experienced or felt at the level of the nervous system, and is therefore perceived to stem from one's unconscious (as is discussed above, in relation to the elusiveness of happiness). It may also be for this reason that happiness is considered to be something 'natural' and 'internally' felt, and conceived of by drawing upon a biological discourse.

Some respondents also felt that to be happy is 'a personality thing', that is, something that one is born with (which again, links closely with the discourse of naturalness discussed above). Indeed, some even used the word 'natural' to describe this, like Linda:

Linda (65, Female): I think some people are naturally happier personalities than others...

Linda's comment suggests that she too sees happiness as something natural and therefore immune or resistant to any social or circumstantial change. Beth also expressed this view:

Beth (23, Female): I think some people are just generally happy, aren't they... just all the time. Yeah, I think it's a personality thing. I don't think it's your situation at all, I think it's your personality, as a person. Like, some people are always... not happy, even if they're in a picture-perfect life.

Thus, for Beth, happiness is something that is out of one's control, and cannot be affected by situational factors; the idea that it is 'a personality thing' again suggests that happiness is something natural.
People also expressed the idea that to be happy is part of one’s identity. Whilst this idea is similar to that of happiness as one’s personality, identity – rather than being considered as something fixed and natural – is something that can be constructed and reconstructed throughout one’s life, and it is this process of construction that is where happiness, for many, can be gained. For example, Nick described happiness as ‘moving forward’:

Nick (25, Male): I think happiness is... [pauses] moving forward. Happiness is moving forward, and indulging your true self.

LH: What do you mean by indulging your true self?

Nick (25, Male): Being brave enough to admit that this is what you really want. And then facing the consequences if that doesn’t happen. [...] I think that’s what happiness is. Working out your needs, and trying to achieve them, not necessarily achieving them.

By describing being happy as the indulgence of one’s ‘true self’, Nick suggests that happiness is intimately linked with being able to understand and come to terms with one’s identity or self, by ‘working out your needs’, thus attempting to reconstruct it as necessary (rather than accepting it as something fixed and unchangeable, like personality). This appears contradictory to happiness as an aspect of personality, as here it is understood that one can ‘work on’ and further understand their identity, which is thus very much within their control. It seems then, that people undertake a process of negotiation between the way in which their personality determines or even constrains their experiences of happiness, and the way in which the self can be modified in order that happiness is maximised.

Thus, considering happiness as an aspect of one’s personality and identity suggests that it is something longer-term and part of the self throughout an individual’s life, as well as having a shorter-term, momentary nature (which will be explored in a later section). Both of these
demonstrate that people are also situating themselves in a discourse of the *uniqueness* and *individuality* of happiness. This resonates with elements of *therapeutic* discourse (Rieff 1966, Furedi 2004, Illouz 2007, Rose 1996) in which contemporary individuals position themselves within a narrative in which they are able to 'work' on themselves and their identities in order to self-actualise and further their well-being. This will be explored in more detail in the following chapter of the thesis.

‘It’s almost one’s duty to be happy’: the centrality of positive thinking discourse

Many of the respondents placed a strong emphasis upon the importance of positive thinking in life. Such a discourse originates from self-help literature and culture, and has subsequently pervaded other realms of cultural and social life (Ehrenreich, 2010). Not only has self-help culture permeated the wider market, leading to the proliferation of a ‘happiness industry’ in which the idea of ‘happiness’ has been attached to a range of marketable products and services, such as books and classes, but its elements can also be found in popular culture and the media, in which we have witnessed a growing popularity of programmes and advertisements centred around the enhancement of lifestyles, and in schools and universities where students are encouraged to attend sessions and classes on maintaining a positive attitude to their studies and to life in general.

A widespread view found amongst many was that happiness is something that should be universally striven for in life, even when suffering may stand as an obstacle to this. Alan described happiness as ‘one’s duty’:
Alan (48, Male): ...it's almost one's duty to be happy. You know, it's easy to be unhappy and happiness can take an effort. You can look at the bright side, you know. Is it half empty or half full... well I can look at it as half full, and therefore it is an attitude.

Alan distinguishes between 'half empty' and 'half full' attitudes toward life, and said you should 'look at the bright side'; this suggests that we have choice over the approach that we take to the way we live (that is, between whether we see the glass as half empty or full, or whether or not we have a positive attitude), being thus in keeping with theories that advocate the idea that we as individuals strive for personal fulfilment via acts of choice in neoliberal democracies (Rose, 1996: see chapter 3 for further discussion).

Despite happiness being considered a 'duty', for Alan, it is also something that requires effort, or putting it another way, something that needs to be 'worked on', in order for this duty to be fulfilled. The idea that we ought to work on our happiness stems from the positive thinking discourse that is advocated by the self-help industry.

Similarly, Beth said that 'you've just got to force yourself' to be happy, even during unhappy periods and Chloe recalled how she felt at the time of a recent relationship break-up:

Chloe (26, Female): I take control of my own happiness... like, it's very rare that I would let myself get that down. [...] when I broke up with [ex-boyfriend], I was like, actually I am going to be fine with this. And I'm gonna be more fine if I think myself there.

She particularly stressed that 'thinking herself' to be fine, or thinking positive thoughts would result in the maintenance of some degree of happiness in such an adverse circumstance, which echoes one of the fundamental precepts of the positive thinking
discourse found in self-help literature (such as that found in popular texts like *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway* (Jeffers, 1997), which emphasises positive thinking as a way of reducing fear). Thinking, then, is a technology or a technique that can be employed in order to transform oneself into a happier or more positive person. This is also a central feature of therapeutic discourse (Rose 1996, Furedi 2004, Illouz 2007), which will be explored further in the following chapter. To not 'let oneself get that down', and to 'take control' of one's happiness also tie in with this precept. Both sit at the intersection of positive thinking and *social control*; the cultural importance of displaying a relatively happy attitude to life ensures that one would 'work' to keep their happiness level at a certain point and to prevent it from falling below a particular threshold which would be viewed by society as undesirable. One would also engage in practices that would help them to 'take control' of their happiness, and to thus take *responsibility* for it, which would again, require a need for it to be 'worked' on. Such practices, as discussed in Chapter 3, are bound up with the political programmes of neoliberal democracies, wherein people who are happy in this way would have the ability to be 'effective' citizens who take care of themselves and of their happiness or unhappiness (Hazleden 2003, Rose 1996, Rimke 2000).

Tom made a more implicit acknowledgement of the importance of positive thinking and the idea of happiness being a 'duty', by admitting that to say he felt unhappy brought about a feeling of guilt, as 'there's always someone worse off that you':

Tom (25, Male): I don't know, I've got this kind of guilt about saying that I'm not happy, I think it's like I'm feeling sorry for myself, I'm just dwelling on things.

LH: Why do you feel guilty about saying that you're not happy?

Tom (25, Male): Well, you know, there's always someone else worse off than you. And, I'm unhappy with what's going on in my life at the moment, but I've got my family, I've got good
friends, you know there's people who are worse off than me... I don't know, maybe it's a bit self-indulgent to say I'm unhappy, when there's a lot worse things that could be happening to me at the moment.

Tom may have felt guilty about admitting to feeling unhappy because making such an admission runs counter to the positive thinking discourse of happiness that many individuals appear to situate themselves in. If this discourse is so widely drawn upon, then any display of discontent or misery may be considered as socially undesirable. Furthermore, whilst Tom himself acknowledged this undesirability – by describing himself as ‘self-indulgent’ as well as stating that ‘there’s a lot worse things that could be happening to me’ – his feeling of guilt is also an indication that others in society may ‘disapprove’ of his unhappiness. This again then, is an illustration of the way in which such positive thinking discourse acts to facilitate social control; the failure to display a positive attitude may elicit a feeling of guilt, which – as symbolic interactionist Shott (1979) writes – is a ‘role-taking emotion’, or one that involves “putting oneself in another’s position and taking that person’s perspective.” (1979:1323).

Guilt, she writes, is one of a number of emotions that involves an individual reflecting on how they come across to others, and may be elicited if he or she realises that others might view his self-presentation as ‘undesirable’, thus providing motivation for more normative conduct (which, in this case, would be a display of happiness or contentment). Therefore, Tom’s feeling of guilt led him to reflect upon and identify the positive aspects of his life (that is, good friends and family), in order to attempt to put on such a display.

As shall be seen in the following section, many of my respondents also highlighted the inevitability and ‘normal’ nature of sad or negative experiences. On first glance, this could be said to be contradictory to such positive thinking discourse; surely people who draw on such a discourse would seek to avoid or prevent adverse events? However, by saying that such
occasions are beneficial for the enhancement of *positive* experiences, it can be seen that these are actually considered to be a *contribution* to positive thinking, as Ehrenreich (2010) found in her study of the experiences of breast cancer sufferers in terms of the positive outcomes and effects that they accorded to this.

So, as can be seen, situating oneself within this positive thinking discourse allows the individual the capacity and ability to 'work on' their happiness and ensure that potential for positive experiences is maximised. Such a discourse also acts to facilitate a kind of emotional control; as long as people constantly undertake this 'work', they will constantly be aiming to ensure that their happiness remains at a level deemed 'desirable' by society. Any failure to conform to positive thinking (that is, experiencing and displaying unhappiness, and therefore contradicting the tenets of the discourse) may also elicit 'negative' emotions such as guilt or shame (Shott, 1979), thus motivating individuals to attempt to regain a more normative (or 'happy') emotional display.

'It's not normal to be happy all the time': The transience of happiness

One of the most frequently occurring themes amongst the reflections of those interviewed was the idea that happiness is something transient, or - in the words of Mark (41, Male) - something that 'can be snatched away'. This section will examine the rationale behind this idea, as well as the way in which some people talked about the necessity of *balance* between happy and more negative experiences. A duality was also identified, as respondents distinguished this shorter-term, variable happiness as something different from one which is longer-term, which many made sense of in relation to the evaluation of their
lives overall and as an element of their identities and selfhood (and like that which was explored in the previous section).

A number of respondents talked about the way in which negative or unpleasant experiences are an inevitable part of life, and therefore one cannot and should not expect to be happy at all times. As Gillian said, to always be happy is 'not normal':

Gillian (45, Female): I've got this thing where I think to get depressed now and again is quite natural. There's always gonna be death, there's always gonna be break-ups, there's always going to be, you know, something's fallen through that you can't have... you know, there's always going to be disappointment and there's always going to be sad times. Especially with bereavement. And that is part of life. Like what I said at the beginning, it's not normal to be happy all the time.

In outlining the transient nature of happiness, Gillian does so through drawing upon the naturalness discourse, and expressed that occasionally-felt negative feelings, or feelings of depression are also 'natural', and that such emotions and the experience of adverse life events are a universal inevitability of life. The idea that 'it's not normal to be happy all the time', also suggests that that there is a 'natural' dimension to the way that happiness is experienced, as well as a framework of norms. That is to say, whilst it might be deemed as socially 'undesirable' to be persistently depressed (as this would run counter to the positive thinking discourse explored above), positioning oneself within this discourse of transience would also suggest an undesirability of persistent happiness. Indeed, Chris expressed this view in response to being asked who the happiest person he knows is:
Chris (46, Male): I guess I have a sort of mistrust of other people who are consistently happy, because I've met people who have seemed very happy but have then thrown themselves off a bridge. So to me, it's like, you can demonstrate it, but that's not necessarily who you really are. You know, I'm a little wary of it. I mean, as I said, I think the happiest person is probably the village idiot! Isn't that awful, that I view permanent happiness as being a mental dysfunction? [laughs]

Thus, Chris' assertion that an individual experiencing permanent happiness would have to be the 'village idiot' and would be likely to have a 'mental dysfunction' illustrates the idea that this would not only be 'abnormal', but also socially undesirable. Anyone who does display constant happiness is unlikely to be giving a genuine 'performance', and may not be expressing his or her 'true' identity (as such a display is 'not necessarily who you really are').

Chris then, draws upon both the biological discourse (through associating happiness with mental functioning) and the discourse of uniqueness and individuality (through distinguishing displays of happiness from happy identities or personalities). In addition to this, happiness for Chris can also be a part of a 'performance', in which it may be displayed regardless of whether or not one 'feels' happy. Although we are constantly needing to 'manage' our emotions in accordance with culturally-specific 'feeling rules' in situations that prescribe this (such as the workplace – see Hochschild, 1979, 1983), happiness that is 'managed' unsuccessfully may be perceived negatively by others if the individual doing so is unable to convince others that he or she is happy. A permanent display of happiness may, furthermore, be likely to regarded by others as 'false' or 'artificial'.

A large number of respondents emphasised a need to recognise the benefits of periodic feelings of unhappiness or misery, in order that happy times can be recognised and fully appreciated. In other words, balance between the two was not only seen to have a social
'desirability' (as it is 'quite natural' to experience negative emotion) but also to have importance for people's well-being. Laurence, for example, described constant happiness as 'stifling' and compared it to living in 'cuckoo land':

_LH: Do you think that to be happy all the time would be a good thing?

Laurence (65, Male): No. To be happy all the time would be so... stifling. You know, I mean, you'd be living in cuckoo land, it just wouldn't be real. I think we've got to be unhappy at times, to make us realise just how fortunate we really are. But being happy all the time, it just wouldn't work.

Thus, like Chris, Laurence expressed a social undesirability toward permanent happiness, by saying that that one who experienced this would not be giving a 'real' performance. Thus, a display of happiness that is 'managed' would, again, also be regarded in a negative light if the 'actor' was unable to convince his or her 'audience' of its genuineness (Hochschild, 1983). For both Chris and Laurence, a display of permanent happiness would almost certainly not be 'real', due to the normative expectation that people cannot be happy all of the time. This would also be detrimental to the individual's well-being, as it would be 'stifling'; Laurence highlighted the way in which negative events can _enhance_ positive ones, as they serve as confirmation for the individual of the aspects of life that they _can_ feel good about. Tom also expressed the view that negative events are a conduit to positive ones, and felt that 'taking the rough with the smooth' was important in terms of giving an individual motivation to 'come forward and progress', or in other words, the provision of a capacity for _self-fulfillment_ and _self-actualisation_:

_Tom (25, Male): I think you've got to take the rough with the smooth. You know, life isn't one constant up. You know, you go up and down, up and down, that's life. You know, you might_
get yourself a great job and earn good money, you might get to lots of good gigs, or Arsenal winning in the league, I don't know, but then the next week you might get dumped by your girlfriend. And then you feel crap! So you can't always be happy. I think it's important to feel that sense of crap... unhappiness, to make you want to come forward and progress. That's what I think is important.

Thus, it could be argued that for the autonomous, free individual living in advanced liberal democracies that is outlined by Rose (1996), a requisite amount of experienced misery is a necessary ingredient for enabling the maximisation of one's potential and fulfilment.

It might appear here that this transience discourse that many people are situating themselves in stands in contradiction to the positive thinking discourse explored in the previous section; surely if the positive thinking discourse advocates a positive attitude toward life and discourages the expression of any negative emotions, then should it not be considered 'normal' or 'natural' to feel these? However, by examining the way in which the respondents have talked about these emotions or experiences, the fact that they talk about them as conduits to positive experience and happiness shows that they do indeed subscribe to this discourse; despite acknowledging the importance of adversity and misery, they also in turn acknowledge their fundamental and positive role in the furthering of happiness at other points in time.

The idea that happiness is transient, then, appears to also be directly opposed to that which was raised in the previous section concerning the way in which happiness is considered to be an aspect of a person's identity or personality. As well as highlighting the short-term, transitory and often emotional nature of happiness, many respondents reasoned that this is in fact one of two types of happiness, the second being something longer-term, pertaining to
life as a whole, and identity and selfhood. Nick described how, for him, happiness can ‘exist on two different levels’:

LH: Do you think that happiness is a short-term, fleeting feeling, or is it longer-lasting?

Nick (25, Male): I think there are various levels, because... I think happiness in a way is like a drug. It’s like, you can get different types of highs, you know, so... you could get, like a ‘I’ve got a job’ high, which is like [makes a sudden gasping sound], or you could get... like now, I feel quite... good about my life. [...] So you can have a general contentment, I think it can exist on two different levels.

He described happiness as being ‘like a drug’, in terms of the ‘different types of highs’ that one can experience, be it something fleeting, sudden and intense, or something more constant with a lower intensity.

Thus to situate oneself in the discourse of transience is to conceive of this particular ‘type’ of happiness as something fleeting and non-permanent, and this therefore suggests that misery is seen as an inevitable part of human experience. Furthermore, misery is constructed in this way, and via the positive thinking discourse, as a beneficial conduit to happiness and self-fulfilment. The transience discourse is also intertwined with the naturalness discourse discussed above, as the experience of misery and sadness is described as ‘natural’ or ‘normal’. So, whilst positive thinking discourse advocates that too much unhappiness is socially undesirable, the transience discourse advocates that too much happiness is ‘unnatural’. Thus positioning oneself in each of these discourses of happiness means that a personal ‘compromise’ needs to be reached in order that a requisite amount of happiness can be expressed and experienced.
Happiness across Time and Space: evolving or unchanging?

All respondents were asked whether they felt that the idea of happiness has changed or evolved over time and history, as well as whether it differs across cultures. This question was asked in order to be able to gather a better understanding of what they think happiness is in the contemporary western world, as compared to other cultures at other time-points. In terms of time, many of them identified a number of social changes and processes that have taken place in contemporary Western society, such as increased consumerism and a growing emphasis on the importance of body image, that have impacted upon what might make us happy.

The rise of consumerism in the West was identified by many as a major factor in the way in which the idea of happiness might vary across time and space, both in terms of the way in which it is defined and experienced. Many respondents talked about the way in which members of society have become increasingly preoccupied with the accumulation of money and the consumption of material goods, and the idea that wealth and material possessions have become a main source of happiness for many in society; many respondents expressed this view, despite also – at other points during their interviews - expressing the widespread sentiment that the accumulation of money, for them personally, cannot yield happiness. Gillian, for example, talked about the negative impact of consumption, whilst emphasising the way in which some – particularly young people – might derive a perceived but ‘false’ sense of happiness from it:

Gillian (45, Female): I actually think that young people think they’re happier ‘cos they’ve got all the material things, but they’re actually unhappier because of the pressures and
responsibilities that they now have. Even paying their mobile phone bill, that was something
that would never have crossed my mind when I was a kid, you know? You didn't have a
mobile phone... [...] now, it's more image conscious, you know, what brand you're wearing... I
think that makes a lot of kids unhappy. Especially if they can't afford the big brands and they
don't want to, you know, be seen in a cheap pair of trainers, and stuff like that. But it's all
nonsense, really. But that's the way that things are being portrayed.

Increased consumerism, emphasis on body image and appearance and 'celebrity culture' are
considered to have replaced religion as a source of happiness as society has progressed.
Chris felt that whilst a belief in God and the church once stood at the basis of one's set of
guiding principles in life, this has now been 'replaced by this kind of competition in terms of
how you look', which has become an integral part of an increasingly individualistic society:

Chris (46, Male): I think the rise of... especially in the West, the rise of the concept of the
individual, it becomes very much what the individual views as being happiness, whereas I
think happiness was much more of a collective thing at one point, I mean we had... there was
almost a jingoistic patriotism, so you were happy to see your country win a war.

Whilst Chris identified individualisation as a social change that has impacted upon 'what the
individual views as being happiness', he does so through acknowledging the uniqueness and
individuality discourse discussed above, by explaining that happiness is now something that
is seen to be experienced on an individual level, rather than as a collective.

A breakdown of normative frameworks was also associated with the changing nature of
happiness; this was expressed particularly by Eileen (63, Female), Helen (77, Female) and
Maureen (80, Female), three of the oldest respondents. Each of them identified an erosion
of values and morals — which they felt was partly due to the decline of religion and changes in the law — as a means by which society might be becoming less happy. Maureen expressed a ‘fantasy’ about the past:

*LH: Do you think that the idea of happiness might have changed over time, or over history?*

Maureen (80, Female): Yes, it has. Because the world is now a different place... the youth of today make it... not so easy for children to play outside during the day. You don’t know who’s walking around... it’s not like it used to be, it’s different. And also, this country is not all of the same people now, it’s all mixed... so you can’t tell what this one’s like, or that one’s like, you know. And this is the difference, it has changed beyond all recognition. And the children, because of the laws of this country now about disciplining children, that you’re not allowed to slap them and you’re not allowed to do this or that, consequently, they’re very rude to their parents... [...] if their children are good children, and don’t give them any worries or problems, then their happiness is derived from that. It’s when their children start mixing with the wrong sort of people, because once they go out of the house, it’s the influence outside that determines the way they go in life. Well that’s my opinion.

As society becomes increasingly characterised by discourses of individuality, uniqueness and naturalness (as has been explored above), an illusory image of a normless society may emerge for many people. These older respondents — in describing how this is taking place — may have thus expressed nostalgia in doing so for past times at which normative frameworks might have been more concrete and tangible.

Lizzie, whilst acknowledging social changes and processes that are likely to have impacted on the lives of contemporary westerners like many of the other respondents, identified a ‘true’,
'inner' and more 'natural' happiness experienced by the individual that is more resistant to such change:

Lizzie (25, Female): For people to be happy, say four or five hundred years ago, they would be in a relationship quite quickly, producing children quite quickly... Erm, whereas these days, happiness is usually derived either from... often consumerism, people often feel happy that I know, who have got brand new clothes, a fast car, a nice house, and that has an impact... on their life. [...] But say... overall your goals, the way that you feel inside... of happiness... that wouldn't have changed. That's just a natural feeling that you get from inside yourself.

Lizzie makes the assumption that happiness existed and was recognised several hundred years ago, and draws upon a heterosexual discourse of family and marriage – concerned with being in a relationship and having children – that has been dominant in modern societies, in which choosing to enter into such a unit is likely to lead to happiness. She felt that what makes us happy may have changed over time, but the fact that happiness is something natural and internal means that its essence has remained the same – that is, that it is a trans-historical part of life.

Thus, increased consumerism, a wider variety of lifestyle choices and a breakdown of normative frameworks are all factors that have been identified as contributors to the changing nature of happiness in contemporary society; many have suggested that some of these have led to a decline in happiness levels. However, the idea that a 'natural', 'inner' happiness exists, which is supposedly trans-historical and thus immune and resistant to these wider social changes means that the variability of happiness which was talked about by many respondents may in fact simply affect the way in which happiness is reflected upon (for example, in terms of what might make people happy), whilst subjective experience of it
could be said to have remained the same. Thus, in reflecting upon the changing nature of happiness across time and space, people appear to situate themselves within the discourse of *naturalness*, as they have disconnected the idea of a 'natural', innate happiness from wider social and cultural changes that have taken place over time. This – as with many of the other dominant discourses of happiness explored in this chapter – echoes that which has also been argued about love; that is, "even when placed within elaborate and sophisticated understandings of the changing patterns of heterosexual relationships, the ideal of love is reified as an absolute given because it is 'natural'". (Johnson, 2005: 44). Despite acknowledgement of wider social changes that may have changed ideas surrounding what makes people happy, happiness too, is reified through this discourse, as something that is tangible, real and existing within the body. Because of these properties, the 'feeling' of happiness is said to have remained the same. This therefore suggests that happiness is considered to be something *asocial*, or something that can be experienced 'outside' of society. Therefore this, as well as the way in which people drew upon the biological and elusiveness discourses, in which happiness was conceived as something bodily, or cerebral, suggests that it is not seen as something necessarily social but as part of human nature, despite social changes that have taken place that have made some contribution to the way in which happiness has been socially constructed. It is this naturalness discourse that seems to be one of the more widely drawn-upon – happiness, whilst social factors are acknowledged (as can be seen above), in this way is seen to transcend any social and cultural frameworks that exist alongside it.

**Conclusion**

When reflecting upon the idea of happiness and making sense of one's experiences of it, people situate themselves within a number of dominant discourses, which together paint a
picture of what they think happiness is and illustrate the way in which happiness is a complex social construction. It has also shed light on the way in which discourse is used in the production of accounts of happiness, and can now be used as an intricate backdrop against which the assumptions that underpin its measurement and its determinants can be considered and interrogated.

It is through the positive thinking discourse – in which happiness is considered to be ‘almost one’s duty’ – that to be persistently unhappy is considered socially ‘undesirable’; however, this must be carefully negotiated when also positioning oneself within the transience discourse, as this specifies that it would also be ‘unnatural’ and ‘inauthentic’ to experience or display continual happiness. Thus, in terms of each of these discourses, an individual must adhere to the framework of norms that pertain to ‘appropriate’ levels of expression and display of happiness. People also situate themselves within a uniqueness and individuality discourse; here, happiness is considered to be uniquely experienced by every individual, and is regarded as a key aspect of both identity (which can be ‘worked on’ and reconstructed) and personality (which is relatively fixed and ‘natural’). In drawing upon the discourses of naturalness, elusiveness and biology, happiness is conceived of as something natural, produced ‘within’ oneself, whether corporeally or from within the unconscious. It is also in this way that the naturalness of happiness is maintained across time and space, so whilst social factors are acknowledged by many (as can be seen above) as having the power to change the causes of happiness over time and space, the ‘feeling’ itself is seen to transcend any social and cultural frameworks that exist alongside it. All of this illustrates the way in which happiness is a complex construction; by showing how we situate ourselves in each of these dominant discourses, it can be seen that on the one hand, happiness is characterised by essentiality, rendering it immune and resistant to social factors, whilst simultaneously
being located within a complex normative framework in which exists cultural guidelines on the way in which happiness ought to be displayed and experienced. Understanding what the factors are that can bring happiness about can only be enhanced further with knowledge of its sociocultural normative context.
Chapter 6  
The Happy Self: understanding happiness through therapeutic discourse

In a further attempt to construct a sociocultural backdrop against which the assumptions surrounding the ways in which happiness is measured and caused can be interrogated, this chapter examines the way in which people situate themselves within therapeutic discourse when reflecting upon the idea of happiness. Whilst the discourses explored in the previous chapter were concerned with what happiness is considered to be, this is one which frames people’s experiences and conceptions of happiness. An understanding of the relationship between happiness and therapeutic discourse is again, fundamental to obtaining an insight into the way in which happiness is socially constructed in the contemporary west, and it can help to illustrate the ways in which people use discourse more generally in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness.

Therapeutic discourse is a facet of the therapeutic ‘turn’ that modern western societies have been said to be increasingly characterised by over the last fifty or so years. This is discussed in detail in the theoretical chapters of this thesis, and I shall thus only outline this briefly here.

Frank Furedi (2004) talks about the way in which “therapeutic language and practices have expanded into everyday life.” (2004:1). He argues that everyday experiences and activities are being talked and thought about in a more ‘emotional’ way, and that words which were previously confined to the realm of psychotherapy and psychology (or the ‘psy sciences’),
such as 'stress', 'anxiety', 'trauma' and 'syndrome' are now commonly appearing in our everyday vocabulary to describe not just troublesome experiences, but also those considered 'normal'; everyday life experiences such as debt, marriage, divorce and childbirth have been transformed into emotion-laden 'life events' for which 'coping' and 'adjustment' are required. Such a discourse, which many argue is quintessentially modern and a defining feature of modern societies, is also characterised by a distinct individualism whereby the needs of the individual and the self are of paramount importance, rather than that of the community, society or common good, and self-sufficiency and self-knowledge are encouraged. Much of this originates directly from the therapy industry and self-help literature.

Many sociologists, such as Rieff (1966), Lasch (1979) and Furedi (2004) have considered the therapeutic turn and the increasing individualisation of modern societies as a movement toward the decline or breakdown of culture, values and community as such practices have permeated numerous realms of social life. Whilst this may or may not be the case, I, in this chapter, aim to simply explain and chart the way in which therapeutic discourse and such psychological and emotional language has been drawn upon by my interview respondents with which to produce accounts of their experiences of happiness (and indeed, unhappiness), and to delineate the ways in which the assumptions around the measurement and the determinants of happiness may be interrogated through an understanding of the use of this discourse.

For many respondents, the experience of happiness is closely related to therapeutic precepts that are concerned with the self: in particular, self-care and self-knowledge, which are both qualities or values that are strongly advocated by the therapy industry and self-help
literature (Rimke, 2000). Factors such as being in control of life, the feeling of being accepted by others, the possession of a certain degree of self-confidence and awareness of one’s needs and personal aspirations are all considered to be fundamental for a happy life. Inability or failure to achieve these would, for them, result in unhappiness. Thus, for those who situate themselves within therapeutic discourse, to be happy is to conform to such precepts; many respondents did so despite never having been consumers of the therapy industry.

Thus, this chapter will firstly demonstrate the way in which people made sense of happiness as something that is to be both sought and achieved by the individual, with minimal input from other people or factors; it will then go on to look at the way in which people acknowledged a need for ‘work’ on and control over one’s self in order to be happy. Next, it will show how some respondents described unhappy experiences in a very introspective way, whereby ‘psychological’ language was used in describing a range of life events, before going on to examine the way in which some respondents reflected upon the interview experience itself using therapeutic language. Intersections between this and the discourses discussed in the previous chapter will be highlighted when applicable, particularly those of the elusiveness, naturalness, biological, uniqueness and positive thinking discourses. However, before undertaking an examination of this, I will firstly consider the views and opinions of the respondents toward the therapy industry itself.

**Views on the therapy industry**

All respondents were asked for their views on the therapy industry, particularly psychotherapy and counselling, as well as psychiatric medication like anti-depressants. Despite the fact that many of them – as will be shown below – positioned themselves in
therapeutic discourse and made sense of happiness via ‘psy’ ideas, many also claimed to be sceptical about the therapy industry itself. Each of the three accounts below demonstrate a degree of disapproval towards it. What is particularly interesting about that of Tom, Chris and Beth, whose accounts are presented here, is that they all make a distinction between cases where therapy or medication for an individual may be necessary or acceptable (which they felt were a small minority of individuals), and others where it is not; it is this latter category which they all highlighted as a growing ‘problem’ in society:

LH: Some people take anti-depressants or see therapists and counsellors in order to feel happy or happier these days. What do you think about this?

Tom (25, Male): Erm... I think some people genuinely need that bit of help. But I also think a lot of people think that it’s the done thing to do, and that it’s the easy option. I mean, there’s history of mental illness in my family, so I’ve known people who have been genuinely ill, they’ve needed counselling, or therapy, or drugs or whatever. I’ve always compared myself to them and said, you know, I’m better off than them because I don’t feel I need it. And I think it’s culture as well, like, my family are northern, their attitude is ‘don’t be soft’, you know, just get on with it. I guess that’s a different attitude to some families in the south... you know you hear about these kids who have been prescribed anti-depressants when they’re about seven or eight years old.... I don’t know, personally I think... it’s all about feeling. You can numb the issues, you can numb the pain, but if you’re depressed about something, say, about being single, you can take anti-depressants, but if you’re still single, you’re only suppressing it. You know, maybe people should just try and accept it, or do something about it. I guess it all depends on your viewpoint.

Tom distinguished between people who are ‘genuinely ill’ and who may need therapeutic intervention, and others who are not, and who rather see it to be the ‘done thing to do’, and attributed the latter attitude to those living in the south of the country; he identified a
difference in opinion between those living in the south and the north. Tom’s words could be interpreted as resonating with the naturalness discourse highlighted in the preceding chapter; in using the example of singleness as a hypothetical reason for an individual’s feeling of unhappiness, he suggests that one should simply ‘do something about it’ rather than rely on therapy or drugs to suppress the feeling. This implies that the latter may simply provide an ‘unnatural’ shield from unhappiness that is nevertheless unable to eradicate it.

Chris also emphasised, like Tom, that to seek therapy or medication if one is ‘in crisis’ or has an emotional or mental ‘scar’ is acceptable:

Chris (46, Male): I think if people are in crisis, or having depression, if medication is needed, or if therapy is needed because of a scar, then I think that’s very valid. But Freudians used to say that you had to have eight years of constant analysis before you can even start to be cured. Well I don’t agree with that, I think that builds a dependency, between the therapist and patient. Or now they’re called clients. So the idea that they’ve had to redefine the nomenclature tells you that anything that’s long-term really shouldn’t be... But on top of that, I think there are certain aspects of your personality that you’re never going to cure. You know, they’re just part of who you are. It’s like, it’s fine. Like somebody once said, it’s like... I knew someone who was a depressive and he said ‘why is it that everybody goes ‘you’re dealing with your depression’? Why don’t they just say ‘you’re living with your depression’?’. Like, it becomes this disease... well maybe it’s not a disease, maybe it’s just... a way of being. And does it really need to be cured? I know people who’ve... because of the circumstances their life’s built up over X, Y and Z, they get to a crisis point where, if they weren’t taking anti-depressants, they’d probably jump off a bridge. So yes, I think in terms of crisis points, therapy is very necessary, and medication is probably a really good idea. To consistently maintain it after the space of maximum... about two years, I think is very dangerous. ‘Cos it builds a dependency, whether it’s chemical or... emotional. Whether that’s as a result of
either pharmacology, or going to have therapy. Whether that’s as a result of either pharmacology, or going to have therapy. I don’t believe in long-term therapy.

However, he expressed disapproval of the way in which people come to depend upon therapy long-term; he also described depression as a ‘way of being’ and did not agree that it should be considered to be a ‘disease’ that must be cured. Again then, his account also echoes the naturalness discourse; depression, for Chris, should constitute a natural part of an individual’s self or character rather than something that needs to be artificially ‘corrected’ by an external source.

Beth – earlier in her interview – said that she did not ‘believe in depression’:

Beth (23, Female): I’ve never needed to take [anti-depressants]. If it’s to do with sorting out this chemical imbalance... as a short-term thing, maybe, but then if it doesn’t get fixed then they’re just continually taking the pills and obviously it’s not... doing the job. I think you’ve just got to force yourself to... to get out there really, not matter how unhappy you are. You’ve just to force yourself to do it.

LH: You said you don’t believe in depression...

Beth (23, Female): Well I think there are like extreme cases where people do have a problem, but I think that like, as a nation, a lot of people say they’re depressed, but they’re only as depressed as I’ve ever felt, but I’d never call myself depressed, even if I felt depressed. Yeah, I think there’s extremes, there will be a few people, but I think some people just jump into it, and... they will say it. I think it’s a worrying thing... like, in other cultures, like I said before, they might be a bit happier because they’ve got a simple life, and I don’t think they have depressed people in those societies. It’s like we’ve invented the term. I mean, there will be extremes where people do have problems, but there are people in between. You know, I could go to the doctor and say I was depressed, and he might give me a pill, but I don’t think I need
one. Do you know what I mean? So there may be people on the borderline, where there may be a different way of looking at it. Because I think we all feel sad sometimes.

Beth described the growing incidence of depression as 'a worrying thing', but also emphasised that a small number of people are 'extreme cases' who have a real 'problem'. Rather than seeking assistance from therapy or medication, she felt that most unhappy people should 'force' themselves to 'get out there'; again, this suggests that 'natural' means of regaining happiness are preferable here.

Tom, Chris and Beth in all of these three accounts – as well as many other respondents - are also positioning themselves in the biological discourse, where they recognise that whilst for most people, therapy and medication are not necessary during unhappy times in life (as they are 'unnatural' means of recovery), there are nevertheless a small number of cases that are characterised by genuine 'illness' which is biological or physiological in nature and therefore therapeutic or pharmacological intervention is acceptable.

Although these accounts illustrate a general scepticism toward the therapy industry (and these are also representative of the attitudes of many of my other respondents), the majority of people nevertheless situated themselves within therapeutic discourse; that is, experience of happiness was, for them, a specifically individual experience, closely related to therapeutic precepts of self-care and self-knowledge, which are both qualities or values that are strongly advocated by the therapy industry and self-help literature. It is this to which the chapter will now turn.

Therapeutic Happiness
An Individual Experience

Many of the people I interviewed considered happiness to be something that is to be sought and experienced by the individual, and is thus a very personal, subjective experience, as opposed to anything social or cultural. Beth commented, for example, that 'you’ve got to find it yourself' and that 'it’s about you':

LH: What do you think happiness actually is?

Beth (23, Female): Well it’s something... I think you’ve got to find it yourself, haven’t you... it’s about you. And it’s about accepting your situation, and making the best of whatever it is. I think if you’re continually striving and you don’t accept where you are, you could be really miserable. So I think it’s just kind of accepting... where you are, and just appreciating all the things that you do have. Instead of worrying about what you don’t have.

Her account suggests that to be happy, an individual must evaluate their personal circumstances, reflect upon all of the different aspects of their life, but also accept what they have. It is only when the individual has done so that they can appreciate themselves and what they have, and to therefore be happy.

Denise also described happiness as something subjective and unique, by talking about the way in which each individual is likely to have their own ‘version’ of it (and thus also positioned herself within the uniqueness discourse discussed in the preceding chapter):

Denise (46, Female): I think different people like different things, you know, there are those of us who would – if money were no object – choose to holiday in a hot place, those of us who would choose to go trekking round cities, those who want to be with people, those who don’t... I think there must be almost as many variations on happiness as there are people.
This comment points to the perceived importance of personal choice in contemporary neoliberal societies; that is to say that how one goes about achieving happiness is considered to be their individual preference, and unconstrained by any other sources outside the self, despite the fact that the accounts of happiness that respondents gave me shared many similarities.

Similarly, Lizzie talked about her experience of happiness in relation to the individual autonomy and choice that she has over it:

LH: Would you say that happiness is a short-term feeling, or more of a longer-lasting state?
Lizzie (25, Female): For me, probably a longer-lasting state. I can't say that everything's going right all of the time, but as long as most things are going well for me, that would generally make me a happy person. I think I've got a lot of choice in that as well. And you know, say I'm not happy because I... I don't know, I'm hungover or something [laughs], obviously that's going to be part of it as well, but you know, that was a sacrifice I made the night before! You know, if I decide I want to talk to my sister on the phone more often, I think that's a choice I can actually make, and I should be able to change it. I mean, not everything's going to be perfect, like I can't easily go to New Zealand or go to see my mum in South Africa, but I can try and make the most of the things that I've kind of got now... erm, obviously with the income that I have as well, to change the way I'm feeling. You know, if I don't feel as though I've got out enough to do enough exercise or something, I can wake up tomorrow morning and decide that I'm going to do this, or I'm going to do that. So I think it's got a huge amount to do with choice.

Her account initially suggests that her happiness is rarely influenced or affected by external or social factors. It could be argued that she positions herself as 'reflexive' here (Beck 1992,
Giddens 1991), with the capacity to exercise choice over how she lives her life. However, she also acknowledges that there may be some barriers to this reflexivity, such as difficulties in being able to visit her family abroad regularly.

Chloe, when discussing her experience of happiness in relation to being in love, talked about the way in which a loving relationship in the past had provided her with happiness in the form of self-confidence. She also stressed, echoing advice that is given in self-help literature, the importance of having happiness ‘within yourself’. Not only does this resonate with the idea that the body or self is a container for emotions (Lupton, 1998), but her account had similarities with advice given by Robert Holden in Happiness Now! Timeless Wisdom for Feeling Good Fast (2007:67): “unless you’re happy with yourself, you will not be happy.” She felt that it is imperative that one should always be happy with oneself rather than relying on a partner or lover for happiness, as this provides a safeguard against intensified misery in the potentiality that a relationship should end. Again, this resonates with Holden’s advice: “The world does not have your happiness; you have your happiness. [...] happiness is not outside you.” (2007:45).

Chloe (26, Female): I had a three-year relationship with someone who I loved and loved me back, and it was lovely, and it was the constant of that security of just having... and I know that during that time I had a lot of confidence because I just had him there, and I knew he thought I was the bee’s knees. And when I came out of it, I was of course like, ‘yeah, I’m single’, but I was also... there was a few years where I didn’t find that again, and I was like ‘urgh’, and what I learnt was, you have to find that [happiness] within yourself. So I’m very much still of the opinion that I don’t really think... I think it can short-term [gasps], lust and fun, and it can have a long-time security, but I think you should always, always, always have it within yourself. And I think people who rely on that definitely don’t have it, because
nowadays, relationships end. You know, they might go on for forty years, but they ultimately do end, so I think if you have it in yourself... and also if you have it in yourself, you can bring so much to the other person.

This account has similarities with Hazleden's (2003) observation that in order to be fulfilled and happy, one must learn to 'love' their self. This should take priority over seeking love from others, and is a key aspect of therapeutic discourse. It also suggests that happiness is something whose source is internal, that is, bodily in some way, or experienced at the level of consciousness, thus again, rendering the experience of happiness very personal and unique. It is in this way then, that the therapeutic or individualisation discourse intersects with those of naturalness and uniqueness.

Whilst these four accounts all tell different stories, one thing that they all have in common is that they all assume that it is the level of the individual – rather than the group, or society, for instance - at which happiness is always experienced. This individualistic view of happiness was also evident when I was asked by two respondents subsequent to their interviews – and independently of one another – how I hoped to make sense of the interview data, as they felt that what they had just told me in relation to their conceptions and experiences of happiness was extremely subjective and personal. This way of describing happiness is not distinctly ‘therapeutic’ per se; however, such a discourse of individualisation is intimately linked with the therapeutic narrative, inasmuch as the latter is characterised by a way of looking at the world in which the individual, the self and self-sufficiency take precedence over communitarian values, and it is the self which takes centre stage in the therapeutic enterprise and in advice literature. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 3, therapeutic discourse has also been shown to obscure the social dimension of the human self, and it is an individual, and perhaps psychological conception of the self, like that
adopted by self-help literature (Rimke, 2000) that takes precedence in people’s accounts of happiness here, over and above ideas around human interdependence.

Related to the idea that happiness is experienced at the level of the individual is that where it is understood as something which is internally experienced, at the level of consciousness. Chloe, for example, described happiness as ‘an internal steadiness’ and a ‘voice inside of you’:

Chloe (26, Female): I don’t think your happiness should come from external... motivations, or material goods, or people... erm, I think they can, and you’ll probably get happy for a bit, but if you rely on that, you can always come back down again. I think it should always be an internal sort of... steadiness, and motivation, because that will never go, that voice inside you will never go... whereas Manolo Blahniks will go out of season [laughs]. I mean, I’m saying this but if I go out tomorrow and buy a really cute All Saints jacket, I’d be really pleased. But I try and personally concentrate myself on having an inner happiness where the outside events are good and bad, because I know that’s the thing that will always be there.

She identified benefits of making sense of happiness in this way; having an ‘inner happiness’ is something that an individual can always have, which may not be the case with happiness that is gained from the ‘outside’ world. It is such self-sufficiency (which is also advocated by the self-help literature) that is likely to enable the individual to maximise his or her happiness; indeed, for Hazleden (2003), self-sufficiency is paramount to “forming a healthy relationship with the self.” (2003:421). Rather than channel one’s energies into caring for others, therapeutic or ‘psy’ discourses encourage investment in the care for one’s self; it is this that allows for the cultivation of a positive relationship with the self, which is in turn most conducive to happiness. Chloe’s account also implies that happiness is something ‘real’
or tangible that exists as a part of one's body that can then be deployed by the individual whenever necessary (which would indeed not be feasible in the case of happiness from external sources). This resonates with the discourse of elusiveness explored in the previous chapter, where those situating themselves within this consider happiness to be a part of the self, yet seemingly elusive due to its embodied and often unconscious nature.

Sophie also talked about the experience of unhappiness in relation to psychological or internal ideas such as paranoia and one's inner thoughts:

Sophie (22, Female): I feel as though I could never be completely happy in life, because you always want what you can't have. Whether you've got what you wanted in the first place, you'll want more than that. So you're never going to be satisfied in life. And I know that in life, even if the thing that comes along that makes you happy, even when you get what you thought was going to make you happy, it will make you happy for a very short time, but you'll still go back to being low again... you know, you might get the relationship you want but then you might be paranoid that it's not going to work out. And a lot of people, they... make it reality. Like, you might say to yourself in your head... you're thinking, getting a bit paranoid, that you're not happy with your life, everyone else has a boyfriend, their lives are great, mine's not. But they're not, other people are probably thinking the same thing! But as soon as you start saying that you start to make it seem like reality. It might not become a reality but you're looking at things in a totally different way, you're making it out to be something it's not. It's like, if you're in a room and you're not talking to anyone, you might think 'no-one's talking to me'... well of course they won't talk to you if you don't talk to them! You're making it a reality.

Echoing Chloe's suggestion that happiness is an internal 'voice', Sophie made sense of feelings of unhappiness through the idea of an internal 'conversation' that one might have.
with oneself, in which one would evaluate the extent to which they are happy. She also highlighted the idea that one’s internal thoughts can become ‘reality’ and that living one’s life in a reality constituted of such thoughts could give rise to further unhappiness. Her account therefore suggests that a major source of the experience and the modification of one’s state of happiness is cerebral, emerging from an internal dialogue. Not only does this converge with the discourse of elusiveness in the same way as that of Chloe above, but it is also a direct illustration of the way in which Sophie (and indeed, Chloe) has situated herself in therapeutic discourse; ‘talking’ with oneself about how one should make sense of particular aspects of one’s life is a form of self-care that is strongly advocated by the therapeutic enterprise and the self-help literature (Hazleden 2003, Rimke 2000).

‘Working’ on the Self

In keeping with the therapeutic ideal of the paramount importance of the self, many of the accounts that my interviewees gave suggested that ‘working’ on oneself, or self-care, is necessary for the achievement or the experience of happiness. In other words, they talked about the way in which one ought to take control over their lives and their inner thoughts, strive to achieve personal ‘goals’ and be proactive about making changes to any aspects of their life that they feel is a source of misery, or that is not giving them happiness.

Thus, Denise reflected upon her positive experience of having counselling, and attributed this to the fact that she was ‘doing something proactive about things’:

**LH:** A lot of people take anti-depressants or see therapists or counsellors in order to make themselves happier these days – what do you think of this?
Denise (46, Female): Erm... as somebody who takes anti-depressants and who has seen a counsellor in the past year... for me, the gobby mare that I am, it's good to talk, it's good to feel that I'm doing something proactive about things. I don't think talking therapies... cognitive behaviour therapy... medication, or whatever, in themselves, make you happy. I don't go with the whole thing that they are happy pills per se. But I think they can help... a combination of all those things can help you get to a place where you can start to move forward. But I don't think it's the pills or the therapy itself that just in a vacuum would make you happy. But I think it can be one of a number of things that help you to start moving forward. So I would say it's a good thing.

LH: Do you feel that they helped you?

Denise (46, Female): Yes, they've definitely helped me... again, I don't think it was the pills, I don't think it was the therapy, 'cos it's also over that with... the medical problems and the surgery and not being in pain, but for me, it was all of those things, and helping me to change how I felt about myself and... give me an opportunity to see what I could do differently. And some bits I can, some bits I can't.

She talked about the way in which this experience made her feel happier; this was not due to the therapy that she had received or the tablets that she had taken in and of themselves, but rather the way in which drawing on these enabled her to change and improve her self-perception after having experienced medical problems, thus deeming this process a form of 'work' on the self. Denise also equated feeling happy with 'moving forward', which implies that she subscribes to this discourse that views life as a 'journey' during which happiness can be sought and which needs to be persistently monitored. This is a way of thinking that is strongly advocated by the therapy industry and which forms part of therapeutic discourse (see Hazleden, 2003:421). For example, psychologist Tom G. Stevens, in You Can Choose To Be Happy: “Rise Above” Anxiety, Anger and Depression (2010), advises that “life is a journey through time and space. In this journey, we are explorers, and each of us finds our own
unique path. In our own private journeys we will visit many places – some happy and some not. Our goal is to learn, create and be as happy as possible.” (Stevens, 2010:45). This is also a technique that people engage in which Rimke (2000) suggests is central to the political programmes of neoliberal societies, in allowing people to be ‘effective’ citizens who are able to take responsibility for themselves. Thus, her account suggests that to be happy requires a degree of ‘work’ or self-care (again, a fundamental precept of the self-help industry); that is, proactiveness about changing an unfavourable situation, which would in turn alter one’s personal outlook and level of self-esteem.

Nick also used the idea of ‘moving forward’ with regard to his happiness, particularly in relation to his work as an actor and television writer:

*LH: Could you tell me a bit more about the way in which you get happiness from your work? What is it about being challenged that makes you feel good?*

Nick (25, Male): *Well... sense of achievement, so when someone says ‘well done, you’re good at something’, that makes me feel happy. But it’s also when I feel that... I’m quite a spiritual person, and I’ve always felt that I’m meant to do what I do. I never chose to be an actor, that was my first instinct, and then I’ve done writing and directing, and it all comes from that stimulus. And so I kind of feel like I’m fulfilling what I was meant to do, which makes me happy. Using my emotions, I’m quite an emotional person, that makes me happy. Because it means that I’m getting them out, and dealing with stuff. Anything that makes me feel like I’m improving, moving forward, rather than just sitting still, makes me happy. But, like, different areas of my work make me happy in different ways... [...] With acting you have to audition and there are lots of different... variants as to if you get the part. Like, they might want someone taller, fatter, darker, anything, whereas with writing, you kind of make a product and then you give the product out, and it’s coming from your voice. So it’s like when you’re telling part of your own story, when you feel like you’re being authentic... if that makes*
sense? If you’re being authentic to yourself... and it’s the same, I think it’s the same in relationships, if you’re being authentic you’re kind of... being true to yourself. You know, that you know you’re not compromising yourself. The times when I felt most unhappy are the times when I felt like I was compromising myself.

He, like Denise, also suggested that being proactive (or ‘dealing with stuff’) by using his emotions is important for being happy, and that it is important to progress – or ‘work’ – rather than to ‘sit still’. He also talked about the happiness that he has gained from writing, where he felt that he was given the opportunity to be ‘authentic’ or ‘true’ to himself. This suggests that he has probably taken time in the past to reflect on the nature of his ‘self’ in order that he is able to recognise authenticity when it is experienced; this could be considered to be another form of self-care or ‘work’, in that it would enable him to get to ‘know’ himself and would not require him to behave in a way that may be discordant with his own character. Talking about his self in this way (that is, the idea of being ‘true’ to oneself, or ‘compromising’ oneself) also resonates with the constitution of the self adopted in self-help literature, whereby one sets up a relation to their self that is ontologically separate (Hazleden, 2003). That is, Nick described being at his happiest when he is being ‘true’ to himself, and thus, when his relationship with his self was at its most positive.

Chloe specifically acknowledged that one ought to ‘work at’ their happiness. Reiterating that discussed in the previous section of happiness being internal, she identified the benefits of this, particularly with regard to the fact that she is single and often spends time alone. For her, ‘working’ at her happiness allows her to enjoy this time:

Chloe (26, Female): I just really believe that [happiness] is something that comes within yourself, and you should work at it just as much as you work at everything else... just as much
as you work at... I don’t know, your abs, or something like that! Or your job, or your relationship with your mum and dad... I think it’s something inside you that you should work at. And I think that’s a big thing about being single as well... I think time alone is so important, and the thing I’m most grateful for is the fact that... I’m happy to hang out with myself, like the fact that I get on with myself.

What is interesting about each of the above three accounts (and indeed, many of the others that concern ‘work’ on the self) is that the respondents talk about their ‘selves’ as though they are separate entities to themselves as individuals. That is, they set up a relation that they have with their selves, so that they as individuals are able to reflect on their selves as though they are another person. This again, is one way in which self-help manuals commonly characterise the self. Indeed, these accounts resonate with the model of selfhood that Rebecca Hazleden (2003) found to be used in a range of relationship manuals (see Chapter 3 for discussion of this); the self is constituted as being “ontologically separate from itself” (Hazleden, 2003:416), in order that it can be ‘worked’ on. Thus essentially, by situating themselves within therapeutic discourse, these individuals appear to gain happiness by cultivating relationships with their selves that they are then able to work on, bring ‘forward’ and ultimately feel happy with. As Hazleden points out, having a high regard for one’s self in this way, and ‘getting on with oneself’, as Chloe says (or even ‘loving’ one’s self) is key to personal fulfilment and happiness.

Taking control of one’s life is another way in which the self can be ‘worked’ on (Hazleden, 2003), and the idea that one ought to be in control of their life and of their self was also expressed by a number of respondents. For example, Chloe talked about the way in which she takes control of her happiness, and that she feels that this is an aspect of her personality:
LH: Do you feel happy at the moment?

Chloe (26, Female): Erm... yes, I do. But... that's probably hugely to do with the personality I was describing to you that I have, which is that I take control of my own happiness... like, it's very rare that I would let myself get... that down. I mean... like, I broke up with my year-long boyfriend about a month ago, and my girl friends were like 'oh my god, we'll come round with ice cream and vodka!', and I got a bit, like, teary that day, I walked away from his house and I was like [makes sad face], and I rang my mum and I was a bit teary on the phone, and my mum said something which is like the way she's brought me up, which is probably what's in me, and she said 'you know, in a month, you'll be over this, so why don't you just be over it now?'... and I literally haven't been upset since. [...] I was like, actually I am going to be fine with this. And I'm gonna be more fine if I think myself there.

Whilst this also resonates with the Positive Thinking discourse discussed in the previous chapter, Chloe highlighted the way in which taking control in this way ensures that she feels a minimal amount of unhappiness. She therefore 'works' on herself, in monitoring her happiness levels. The 'thinking' herself to happiness that she talked about, then, could be considered a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988); it is a technique that she utilises in order to regulate her happiness. However, whilst she suggests that happiness is something that one can easily control, she also attributes this to her personality and her upbringing (by describing her mother's similar outlook), thus implying that this is something relatively fixed and innate. Suggesting that her attitude toward happiness is also inherited from her parents demonstrates that she also situates herself within a biological discourse in making sense of this.
Similarly, Martin described the way in which a loss of control — due to a recent car crash, burglary and change in employment that he had experienced — led to a feeling of immense unhappiness, loss of confidence and anxiety. Although the quote below is about confidence — an aspect of self-knowledge, which will be explored in the following section — what Martin says about losing control relates to a lack of ability to 'work' on oneself:

Martin (32, Male): I've found myself in the last year being tremendously anxious. [...] I guess you could say that my confidence has obviously taken a blow, because... I lost control of the car... lost control at some point of my career, I thought... lost control of my house, because people came in and took my stuff when I was in bed... so yeah, a lot of feelings of loss of control. The thing with the Japanese company where I worked, which didn't work out — I was forced to find another job but it was a scary time, it was a form of loss of control. 'Cos I used to be tremendously confident in my jobs and in myself, probably too much, I was probably too aggressive, saying things that were too arrogant... So yeah, a number of events which could all be put on the same nominator, the loss of control, whether it's over your steering wheel, over your job, over your house. And yeah, I guess that sort of erodes your... not your confidence as a man maybe, but your sense of being in control of life. It makes the world seem like a much more scary place. I think it's just something you have to work through, you know.

He equated the loss of control with a loss of confidence in himself; his account suggests that to be in control of life is a normal and desirable quality and suggested that in order to regain this quality, he would need to 'work through' these negative emotions, thus directly suggesting that some kind of inner reflection and 'work' on himself would be required.

Thus it can be seen that the idea that happiness can be gained via 'work' on oneself forms a fundamental part of therapeutic discourse. Individuals who do so seek to examine their
selves attempt to cultivate a relationship with their self that they set up as being ontologically separate, as is often done in self-help literature (see Hazleden, 2003); if one does this successfully, this may be manifested in a feeling of possession of a greater degree of control over their life. Individuals who feel that they lack control, such as Martin, may therefore be considered to have a weaker, or less ‘healthy’ relationship with their self (2003:421). That is to say, a loss of control and the occurrence of unpredictable or unplanned events may result in an individual feeling less able to have a high level of regard for themselves.

‘Knowing’ Oneself

Closely related to the idea that one ought to ‘work’ on or ‘care’ for their self in order to be happy is that of the way in which one should ‘know’ oneself; these are two of the most fundamental and central self-oriented precepts of therapeutic culture and discourse, and is another central dimension of self-help texts. As Hazleden says, “the ethical telos of the books is therefore that of an individual who is self-regarding, and who has mastered the arts of self-knowledge and emotional self-discipline.” (2003:424). It could also be argued that the seeking of self-knowledge is inextricably bound up with self-regulation and the governing of the self, in order that people are able to be ‘effective’ citizens (Rimke 2000, Foucault 1988).

This idea was expressed by some respondents who highlighted the way in which self-confidence or self-awareness is important for being happy, such as Danielle and Lizzie:

*LH: Do you think we need to feel confident in order to feel happy?*

Danielle (26, Female): Er, well confident in who you are, not necessarily extrovert or outwardly... confident. I think you can be shy with new people in social circumstances, or at
work, but still be a happy person. [...] yeah, just being confident in who you are and that you’ve got friends who you like and who appreciate you the way you are. I think that makes you happy.

LH: What do you think happiness actually is?

Lizzie (25, Female): Erm... I think it’s feeling... maybe confident... with yourself and your surroundings. [...]  

LH: Do you think confidence and happiness are linked?

Lizzie (25, Female): I think to a certain extent, yes. I think if you’re happy in yourself, I think that that naturally comes out through the person that you are. As well, I think that you do have a lot more confidence to... because you’re content with yourself. Well, not content with yourself, but maybe you’re... over-content, because that’s just being happy with yourself. And I think that naturally comes through. And the way that you talk, the way that you act, the way that you speak... so yeah, I’d say definitely, that can come through.

Self-confidence, another prominent aspect of therapeutic culture, is, according to self-help writer Napoleon Hill (2002), an outcome of self-knowledge: “Self-confidence is the product of knowledge. Know yourself, know how much you know (and how little), why you know it, and how you are going to use it.” (2002:225). In both of the above accounts, a happy person is someone who is confident with who they are; that is to say, someone who possesses some kind of knowledge of their identity and character, and for whom positive evaluations from others would be likely to reinforce this knowledge. Lizzie also described the way in which one’s confidence can be displayed in their behaviour, thus constituting a major element of their personality, which she also described as natural. Therefore, whilst Lizzie feels that confidence – and heightened self-knowledge – is integral to happiness, she also views this as something natural, and thus produced internally for the individual to experience.
Denise also highlighted the importance of being comfortable with oneself to be happy and suggested that this is a more important factor than one's outward, physical appearance:

LH: Do you think beauty and appearance is important for feeling happy?

Denise (46, Female): [pause] Probably, yes. I mean, I think most of us at some point focus on some aspect of our physical appearance, whether it's 'I could do with losing a few pounds', or 'I need to get my nails done', or 'let me dye my hair blonde' or whatever. You know, something relatively small. Or other things more major, a little bit of surgery, a bit of botox, or whatever. I think it's of concern and it affects the happiness of that person, but I don't think most other people look at someone and think 'oh, she'd be so much prettier if she was blonde', or 'she'd be so much prettier if she was a 38 double-J instead of being blatantly a 34B, how dare she leave the house like that!' [laughs]. But I think it's about how you feel, rather than how the world sees you. But because there are certain images, especially in this country and the western world, it's easy to believe that everybody thinks that you must look this way or you must... but people don't. I think people, when they're looking at somebody else, what they find attractive or whatever is people who are comfortable with themselves. But I think we... we forget that and we think 'oh, she can do that, because whatever', but it's about being happy with yourself, 'I'm happy with myself, I don't have to lose that extra couple of pounds'.

She talks about the way in which physical appearance is considered by some to be important on a social level, but then goes on to emphasise that for most people, confidence on a deeper, more internal level is more important, and that 'it's about being happy with yourself'. Thus, despite a preoccupation in the media with appearance, what is actually important is the possession of a certain level of self-knowledge in order that one can appreciate oneself. Like with the idea of 'working' on oneself then, to 'know' oneself requires that the individual 'loves' him or herself, and successfully cultivates a positive
relationship with their ‘ontologically separate’ self (see Hazleden, 2003). It is only when such a positive relationship has been established and can be subsequently maintained that a sense of both self-confidence and happiness can be achieved.

Denise’s account also illustrates the importance for happiness of the symbolic interactionist constitution of the self. Her statement that ‘it’s about how you feel, rather than how the world sees you. I think people, when they’re looking at somebody else, what they find attractive or whatever is people who are comfortable with themselves’, may initially suggest that the source of happiness is the ‘I’, rather than the ‘me’ (Mead, 1934). Happiness is brought about by oneself, and how ‘comfortable’ they are about themselves, rather than by others. However, a happy ‘me’ may be achieved by displaying to others that one is comfortable with oneself, and that they possess a degree of self-knowledge.

The idea of understanding oneself was also talked about by some respondents. Chris talked about the way in which moving to the UK from Canada several months previously had provided him with a better understanding of himself and ‘define’ who he is, and this for him was a source of happiness:

Chris (46, Male): What’s really interesting, and what makes me happy, is that when you’re outside of your culture, you learn what it is to be of your own culture, because you can see it by difference. So it actually defines you. And Canadians are consistently looking for definition, because they sit in this limbo... there’s a cultural and national obsession about what it is to be Canadian. [...] the thing is, that when you leave... all that you’re familiar with, you’re forced to like, finally define who you are. And so that actually makes me happy, bizarre as that may seem.
Lizzie also felt that the increased self-understanding that she had gained from her relationship with her sister since she moved to the UK from New Zealand was a source of happiness:

**LH: Would you say that it's important to have good relationships with family and friends in order to be happy?**

Lizzie (25, Female): Yeah I think so, I think that's probably the thing that would make you most happy, and also the thing that could make you most depressed. Erm, I think I'm a lot happier with the way I am around my sister, especially since I moved over here, we've got a much better relationship than we ever did back in New Zealand. Spending more time with her over here and understanding who she is as a person, even though I didn't have to, but she's blood... I feel a lot happier in myself, because I understand who I am more, and who my sister is more. And because we've only got each other as well, over here... well, we've got aunties and uncles and things like that, but we've almost recovered ourselves over here... and we've got a much better relationship. I'm starting understand her as a person, that's taken a bit if time and effort actually, because I do see that we're very different in the way that we are, our lives are almost completely different. So I think something like that can make you happier.

Thus, Chris and Lizzie both gained happiness from an increased self-understanding that they had obtained after moving to the UK from abroad. Whilst Chris expressed that gaining happiness in this way was 'bizarre' and perhaps unusual, it could indeed be said that – in the same way as the others who position themselves in this discourse – it is the increased self-knowledge, the ability to hold himself in higher regard, and therefore the cultivation of a positive relationship with his self (Hazleden, 2003) that has instilled this feeling. In other words he – as well as others who have expressed this – he has gained a feeling of happiness from knowing or defining who he is. For Lizzie, such a reflexive relationship is also present.
By understanding her sister’s identity, she has also learnt about her own, thus enhancing her self-knowledge.

Martin, on the other hand, talked about the way in which he has experienced unhappiness because of a ‘struggle’ or inability to ‘find’ himself and be confident:

Martin (32, Male): I think my current relationship has triggered a bunch of emotions which I’m not familiar with, which I’m scared of in some ways. Yeah, my life has definitely changed a lot in the last... and that’s fine, I just wish it wouldn’t make it so difficult, because I feel like I’ve struggled more nowadays than I used to...

LH: Struggle with these emotions, or with life generally?

Martin (32, Male): Struggle in terms of... finding yourself, maybe being happy, being confident, thinking more... yeah. Nowadays I just feel stressed out all the time, I didn’t used to have that. I ask myself why, where does it come from, where’s the problem, why can’t I just go back to... you know. It doesn’t necessarily mean I want to live the life I had two years ago, although it certainly was simpler [laughs], and only involved going out and earning money, getting drunk, having fun. So yeah, everything’s become much more of a question.

He introspectively described the way in which his relationship with his girlfriend over the past year – which had also led to a change in lifestyle for him – had led to an experience of unfamiliar emotions, which he saw to be a cause of great fear. Thus, by setting up a relation of his self to itself, as is frequently done in self-help literature and which is also a major aspect of therapeutic, or ‘psy’ discourse (Hazleden, 2003), he described this inability to find himself - or his ‘loss’ of self, which had led to a feeling of anxiety. He sought to deal with this by asking himself questions, and engaging in internal dialogue; he sought to ‘work’ on himself in order to identify the cause of the problem. Happiness for Martin could therefore
only be regained if he were able to obtain more self-knowledge, and if he was therefore able to improve his relationship with his self, and have higher regard for it. Martin, then, in drawing on major aspects of self-help culture in giving his account of unhappiness (that is, conceiving of his self as something separate that he then felt able to turn back on and 'work' on through internal dialogue, and expressing a wish for greater self-knowledge) also situated himself within therapeutic discourse.

Lizzie talked about the way in which her work was a source of happiness for her, particularly in relation to the fact that she now knows what she would like to do with her life:

Lizzie (25, Female): I think [my career] is going really well for me at the moment. About six months ago I was in a secretarial role for the Director of Communications at [government department] and when he got promoted, I had the opportunity to move, to get rid of the secretarial role, and start at the bottom of press and marketing which is an area that I really want to get into. So I'm kind of in the process at the moment of... even though I get called a press and marketing officer, I'm almost a little bit below that role, but I'm being trained up by people that I really respect a lot, and have good relationships with all my colleagues... they're kind of training me up at the moment and they're really helping me and mentoring me and kind of showing me the ropes for the things that I need to do to be able to get up to the next level in my career. So even though I'm not quite there yet, I'm at a stage of my life where I finally know what I want to do... for the moment, and I'm achieving it at the moment.

It is clear from Lizzie's account that she had previously engaged in much personal reflection on what she would like to do with her life, and that having arrived at a decision about this—and therefore furthering her self-knowledge—has led to a feeling of happiness. This
furthering of her self-knowledge is something that strengthens one's relationship with their self, and gives rise to being happy.

Similarly, Martin also felt that to be happy requires knowledge that one's life is going 'in the right direction':

Martin (32, Male): nowadays most of my happiness comes from being with somebody that I love, or really like, who I feel loved by, and understood by, and you get a sense that you're realising your potential I suppose. That your life is heading in the right direction...

Again, by expressing that happiness is 'realising your potential', Martin's account suggests he had undertaken some reflection that allowed him to understand what his potential was. Thus, like for Lizzie, Martin gained happiness from an increased self-knowledge in which an understanding of what he wanted from life was paramount. Thinking about life in terms of 'direction' also relates to the therapeutic ideal that life is a 'project' or a 'journey' in which one is able to 'work' on themselves in order to maximise their happiness (Rose, 1996). Therefore contemporary individuals who situate themselves in therapeutic discourse appear to engage in this kind of reflection throughout their lives to ensure that they remain personally fulfilled; this reflection is also a form of 'work' on the self that enables the individual to take control over their life and self, to gain self-knowledge and to ultimately achieve happiness.

Therefore when situating oneself in therapeutic discourse, knowing oneself is another fundamental way in which happiness can be achieved and maximised. Being confident and comfortable with oneself is considered necessary, as well as the possession of a sense of personal identity and self; that is, a 'healthy', positive relationship with oneself (Hazleden,
2003) is imperative. Lacking this relationship, and an absence of self-knowledge, may bring about a feeling of anxiety and one may therefore feel inclined to ‘work’ on oneself, or engage in internal dialogue with oneself (or draw on another technology of the self (see Foucault, 1988)) in an attempt to regain this and find happiness.

**Unhappiness and Introspection in Everyday Life**

Some of my respondents situated themselves in therapeutic discourse by describing unhappy, but often mundane, everyday experiences, using introspective and psychological language, thus transforming them – as discussed at the start of the chapter – into emotion-laden events. This is another aspect of neoliberal, therapeutic culture that Rose (1996) and Furedi identify (see ‘Therapeutic Culture’ section of Chapter 3 for further discussion of this).

Gillian talked in a very general and hypothetical – but introspective - way about how she would deal with feelings of depression if they ever arose, though this was not in relation to any particular experience per se. She stressed that she would not take medication, but that she would nevertheless want to experience the depression (or indeed, ‘turmoil’, as she described it):

Gillian (45, Female): I personally, if I was going through a depressed stage and the doctor said ‘here are some anti-depressants’, I don’t think I’d take them, I think I’d be strong enough to get through it. And I think I’d probably want to cry my eyes out, I’d want to get it out of my system. Want to go through the turmoil, knowing that I was gonna come out the other side, do you know what I mean?
The idea that she should want to 'come out the other side' suggests that for Gillian, life is again considered a kind of 'journey' on which a period of depression might feature, thus resonating with therapeutic discourse. Recovery from such a period would then be made sense of as a later point on that journey, a point at which one would have removed the depression from their 'system'. Depression therefore, is seen as something real and tangible, but also corporeal and experienced as a bodily process in the same way as happiness may be made sense of. The idea that the body is a container for the emotions is used here (Lupton, 1998); depression is something that needs to be removed from this container, or from one's 'system'.

Mark also described his actual experience of depression and anti-depressant use introspectively, using words like 'anxious' and considering himself to be in a 'dip'; that is, words which were previously confined to the realm of psychotherapy and psychology (or the 'psy sciences') (Furedi, 2004). He felt reluctant to start taking medication for his depression again, due to the feelings of anxiety and misery that they had caused him previously, and instead, hoped that a man with whom he had had recent correspondence via an online dating website and whom he was due to meet face-to-face would distract him from his depression:

Mark (41, Male): I actually cancelled a doctor's appointment this afternoon because of wanting to go on anti-depressants, and then I decided against it. I'm prone to depression anyway, and again, that's to do with chemical imbalances I think. [...] I spent years on anti-depressants. And I... I'm being truthful here, anti-depressants gave me a bit of an edge that made me feel anxious. [...] I need to get out of the dip that I'm in at the moment, and... fingers crossed, Paul [man from the Internet] will be a way to do that. I'm not suggesting that Paul will be the fix, but he'll be a distraction to get me out of the dip that I was in, whether it
comes to anything or not. So I decided against going to the doctor to get prescribed anti-depressants because they make me feel anxious and miserable.

He attributed his depression to 'chemical imbalances' which again suggests that for him, as with Gillian, depression is something biological and physiological. That is, he and Gillian both situate themselves within a biological discourse of unhappiness. Whilst people describe depression using introspective and 'emotional' language, situating oneself in therapeutic discourse also gives rise to the idea that depression, like happiness when considered in relation to the 'naturalness' discourse, is considered to be biological, produced and experienced within the body. Furthermore, this discourse of unhappiness promotes the idea that the bodily experience of depression may be understood to 'contaminate' one's happiness in some way (by perhaps limiting the production of serotonin) and thus causing a feeling of misery.

Other respondents used such introspective and emotional language in describing everyday – and sometimes mundane – experiences. Martin, for example, talked about difficult times that he had experienced in his previous job, and the words 'traumatising', 'messed me up' and 'suffer' featured in his account of this:

Martin (32, Male): I then signed on with a Japanese company, first as a contractor, but within three weeks they made me permanent, but in the end that totally didn't work out, so that was a very bad experience. It was quite traumatising as well, because I'd never had such conflict at work... Japanese companies are very different, you have to be in at nine o'clock. If you get in at one past nine a few times, they'll know and they'll send you a written letter saying you could be subjected to disciplinary... very, very tough. And yeah, I think that kind of messed me up as well, because it made me very fearful of people I work with, because they
might be nice to you, but – at least at that place where I worked – but then they sort of...
completely did a U-turn. For a long time it made me really suffer... so then I moved to [current
workplace], which I guess was a really good thing...

Alex, too, talked about having to move away from his home town aged sixteen, and having
to start a new college in an unfamiliar new place; he described the ‘panic attacks’ that he
experienced at this time:

Alex (25, Male): I really didn’t cope [with moving away] very well. Er... I think I have a
tendency to bottle things up. So yeah... first of all I just got really, really angry inside, but I
didn’t really express it much. Yeah, I really didn’t cope with that, I just got really really angry,
and frustrated. Actually it caused... in the end, I started having panic attacks... I think it was
because of this, whatever it was, boiling up inside me, and I wasn’t expressing it.

In both cases, the events described - experiencing conflict in the workplace and relocating to
a new area - are not unusual experiences in the contemporary west; nevertheless, both
Martin and Alex described their experiences as ‘traumatising’ and anger-inducing. That is,
they both described their experiences using ‘psy’ vocabulary (Furedi, 2004). For Martin, his
unhappiness was something psychological with which he ‘suffered’; Alex talked about the
way in which he needed to ‘cope’ with it, but found this difficult, to the point of experiencing
panic attacks, a medical or psychological term used increasingly in western culture to
describe a highly intense period of fear and anxiety. Like with that of Mark and Gillian, the
language that Alex uses in his account suggests that he situates himself within a biological
discourse as well as that of the therapeutic; here, anxiety or unhappiness is reified as
something real and tangible that can be ‘bottled up’ within oneself. Alex, too, then, draws
upon the idea of the body being a container for the emotions (Lupton, 1998), in which they
can be ‘controlled’ in this way. He also utilised a fluidity metaphor (Lupton, 1998) in talking about the way in which his feeling of anger, which was located internally, ‘boiled up’ as it grew in intensity.

Martin also talked about the experience of a panic attack – albeit a hypothetical one – in another account, with regard to how he would be feel about potentially becoming a father:

_**LH:** Thinking back to what you said about marriage and having children, do you think that’s something you could look to as a potentially happy time?

Martin (32, Male): Yeah, I think so. I think you enter a different dimension, you have this nice cosy feeling of having a family, yeah it would be nice. But scary as well, like, last summer I thought that my girlfriend might be pregnant [...] but it didn’t happen. Probably a good thing. But the moment when I thought ‘what if she is pregnant’, it was actually quite scary. Like, I think I’d have a massive panic attack if I suddenly was a father, I’d have like somebody sitting there and I’d be responsible for it! I’d be like woah... I’d need a lot of Valium to get over it.

He commented that he would need to take Valium to cope with and recover from such an event. His use of this turn of phrase shows that again, he situated himself within a biological - as well as therapeutic - discourse here. Whether or not he would take it in a real situation – as doing so would be to oppose the naturalness discourse discussed in the previous chapter – the fact that he considers a drug as a mode of recovery suggests that such a feeling of anxiety is again, something considered as biological. Making sense of feelings of anxiety via the idea of a panic attack is also an interesting one; the panic attack features in the DSM-IV along with a host of physiological causes and symptoms and so this again instantly renders the experience of negative emotions – whether panic or depression - as a somewhat biological or medical ‘problem’ or ‘illness’. Thus, in both of these cases, people position
themselves not just within *therapeutic* discourse (via the use of emotional and introspective language) but also a biological discourse in the description of life events.

People, then, situate themselves within therapeutic discourse both when giving accounts of happiness, but also when giving accounts of unhappiness. Simultaneously, they position themselves within biological discourses, in making sense of happiness and unhappiness as bodily, corporeal and internal processes. Emotional and introspective language, as well as a conception of unhappiness and negative emotions as something biological and internal are therefore both central features of the dominant discourses that people replay when producing accounts of their happiness and unhappiness.

**The Interview Experience: therapeutic reflections?**

Two respondents – Denise and Laurence - used therapeutic or introspective language to reflect on their experiences of being interviewed:

*LH: Is there anything else you'd like to add before I switch the tape off?*

Denise (46, Female): *No... I mean, that was interesting. I wasn’t sure how and in what direction that was going to go in, but no, that’s... I’ll be thinking about this later today! Not that I’d necessarily change answers, but just... sometimes you find yourself saying things and you don’t realise... you hadn’t previously sort of put that whole thought together, and you might suddenly think ‘ooh, yeah, I suppose I do think that and I hadn’t realised that!’.*

Laurence (65, Male): *There’s a lot of ignorant people out there, and you’ve just got to be very wary. Like, I figured that you must have been very gay-friendly otherwise you wouldn’t have been in this position. If it had been an ordinary club and you’d said can I ask you questions about being happy, and it was a normal – well, whatever normal is – club, I’d have been more*
nervous thinking 'am I gonna give myself away here and see what her reaction is, because she doesn't know what I am?' You might have been anti-gay and could have given me a bad time, and I'd be getting very angry. And then again, I could have turned around when you first came in and said 'oh by the way, I'm gay' and you might have gone 'oh god, are you?' or, 'it doesn't matter to me', but I may have been on edge about it and felt nervous, and the answers might not have come out as freely as they have done. But you've been good, you've said your mm's in the right places!!

Denise talked about the way in which she planned on reflecting further on her experience later on that day, and that being interviewed had helped her to come to terms with her thoughts and ideas. Thus, it could be said that the interview in and of itself allowed her to utilise a technology of the self, whereby she engaged in further 'work' on herself, and that further reflection increased her self-knowledge.

Laurence also gave an account of his reflections on the interview process, particularly with regard to my perceptions - as an interviewer - of him; he expressed anxiety that he had felt regarding the degree to which I would be accepting of his sexuality after recruiting him from an LGBT social group of which he is a member. Thus, the interview experience had also prompted him to reflect in some way on himself and his selfhood; knowledge that I as an interviewer was indeed not 'anti-gay' and therefore accepting of his identity provided him with a sense of reinforced confidence and happiness, thus again, giving rise to an increased self-knowledge for Laurence. Therefore, even when talking about their interview experiences themselves, it can be seen that some respondents situated themselves within therapeutic discourse - and may have even gained happiness - when making sense of this.
Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the way in which people situate themselves within therapeutic discourse when making sense of their experiences of happiness – and indeed, unhappiness. Thus, when doing so, happiness is conceived of in a number of ways concerning the self, many of which are also central to self-help discourses: that is, it is considered to be something that is experienced at the level of the individual; a personal and subjective experience that is psychological in nature and takes place at the level of consciousness. ‘Working’ on oneself, or self-care, is also considered necessary for the achievement or the experience of happiness, that is, to have control over one’s life and inner thoughts and to strive to achieve personal ‘goals’. To be happy also requires self-knowledge, often in the form of self-confidence and knowledge of where one’s life is ‘going’. In the cases of both working on and knowing oneself, the self is considered as something ontologically separate, with which one can have a relationship (Hazleden, 2003); it is the cultivation of a positive, or ‘healthy’ relationship with one’s self that is the foundation upon which such a discourse of happiness sits. Unhappiness is also articulated via therapeutic discourse; adverse events that occur in everyday life are described using introspective, emotional language, using vocabulary taken from the ‘psy’ disciplines, such as words like ‘trauma’ and ‘suffering’, and it is in this way that such negative experiences (and the emotions that accompany them) are medicalised; that is, they are thought of in biological terms and rendered a physiological ‘problem’. In other words, many people simultaneously replay two dominant discourses - therapeutic and biological - when talking about their experiences and perceptions of happiness.

Thus, by understanding happiness through therapeutic discourse, it can be shown how the permeation of culture and language from the ‘psy’ sciences and the self-help industry into
realms of everyday life has led to the existence and provision of a modern linguistic framework with which many people make sense of our experiences of happiness. It is in this way that people replay dominant discourses – particularly therapeutic discourse, but also that of the biological - in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness.

Therapeutic discourse is clearly a fundamental way in which people can understand happiness, and it is such a discourse and linguistic framework – often combined with other discourses discussed in this thesis - that goes some way to underpin the assumptions that are made in the measurement and the examination of the causes of happiness, as well as the modern conception of happiness to which people so often subscribe.
Chapter 7

‘Pack animals’? Interpersonal relationships and happiness

Relationships with others (whether social, familial, intimate or sexual), could be said to have a major impact upon people’s experiences and perceptions of happiness; indeed, ‘family relationships’ and ‘community and friends’ were two of the ‘most important’ ‘Big Seven’ causes of happiness identified by Richard Layard (2005: 63), and social ties, or ‘social capital’ has been found to be linked to well-being more generally (Helliwell 2003, Helliwell & Putnam 2004). All of the respondents with whom I talked spoke in some way about the importance of this, and therefore the assertion that this is an important determinant of happiness may well be applicable.

However, this association may not be as straightforward as Layard suggests. The idea that interpersonal relationships should play a major role in one’s experience of happiness suggests an interesting contrast with the therapeutic discourse explored in the previous chapter, within which people situated themselves when making sense of happiness as something individual, internal and self-orientated. Could it thus be argued that the Western construction of happiness sits at the intersection between social or communitarian discourses (whereby emphasis is placed on the importance of friendship, community and belonging) and that of the individual or therapeutic? What is the relationship between these two seemingly disparate discourses? How might people produce their selves through each of them? This chapter will attempt to address these questions through an examination of people’s accounts of the role of interpersonal relationships with others in their experiences of happiness, and will then consider the ways in which such relationships might play a fundamental part in the social construction of happiness in contemporary western societies.
The chapter will begin with a consideration of the extent to which the happiness of society is important for the happiness of individuals; that is, do people describe feeling happy when they know that others around them – or, the rest of society – are happy? And further, do they do so whilst also making sense of happiness as something individual, personal and subjective? It will then examine the importance of interpersonal relationships in people’s lives in a general sense, and their relationship with happiness. Next, it will go on to explore the way in which people make sense of happiness in relation to love and sexual relationships, as these were two types of relationships that a large number of respondents described as being important for happiness. Similarly, a lack of such relationships was identified by some as a cause of unhappiness, and it will thus go on to consider the ways in which people negotiate the absence of these relationships through the ideas of loneliness and singleness, before ending with a more general discussion of the ways in which discourses around interpersonal relationships compete with therapeutic discourse in accounts of happiness, and their significance for its social construction.

Happy Society, Happy Selves?

If ties with others can be considered an important factor in people’s experiences of happiness, one might expect that individuals would gain such a feeling from the knowledge that the world or the society they live in is a ‘happy’ place. Indeed, a small number of respondents expressed this idea, like Chris, who felt that one is happy when there is a ‘happy world’:

*LH: What do you think happiness actually is?*
Chris (46, Male): Well, again, I think for me personally, it’s often clouded by the idea of what I think happiness is for other people, because quite often, what makes me happy is what makes other people happy. I think you’re happy when there’s a happy world. It’s hard to be happy and then walk outside and go ‘oh my god, this is all horrid’.

In explaining what he thought that happiness is, Chris situated himself in a discourse that runs counter to that of the therapeutic; for him, his happiness was determined by the happiness of others rather than by any individual or internal processes. However, he expressed this by describing his own personal happiness as something distinct from – or something that is ‘clouded’ by - the happiness of others. This suggests that he nevertheless considers happiness to be something that is experienced at the level of the individual self, thus including a therapeutic dimension. Eileen similarly talked about the way in which the sight of suffering in other parts of the world was, for her, a major source of unhappiness:

Eileen (63, Female): ...I always say if you’ve got your health you can be happy. But going back to what I said before, if you see a young parent with a child disabled, in a wheelchair, how can those parents be totally happy, inside? Because it’s heartbreaking... heartbreaking, really. And you see how other kids in the world, how in underprivileged, third world... how those children... I’ve never been out there, it’s something I’d like to do actually, I’d like to go out and help those underprivileged... there is a woman who’s doing that at the moment, she’s older than me. And to see those kids at the school that they built out there... they’d never had anything. But now these children have been nourished, and have an education, they’re happier, you see. So if, like me, you’ve seen suffering, it makes me unhappy, when I see suffering.

Again, Eileen’s account contrasts with therapeutic narratives of happiness as she describes the way in which images of human suffering in other parts of the world (that is, something
that exists outside of her individual self) bring about a feeling of unhappiness. However, as with Chris, her account also suggests that she may consider happiness to be an individual, internal experience, as she speculates about the ‘inner’ happiness of parents of disabled children, thus also resonating in part with therapeutic discourse. Gillian also gave an account in which she described the way in which her understanding of capitalism in society made her feel unhappy:

Gillian (46, Female): ...a few years ago, I didn’t work for a while, I actually didn’t work for four years, by choice. But in that time, I did lots and lots of reading, different things, stuff on the Internet, books that people had lent me that I’d never got round to... And I remember getting very depressed, I kind of think I had a bit of a meltdown. And what it was... I had more time to think, and more time to read, and when I realised how the world works, especially how capitalism works, and how from our actions, what’s happening on the other side of the world, it kept crashing down on me, and I was just... that made me really unhappy. But you come through it a stronger person, ‘cos you kind of realise, you know, how the system is set up and it’s not really for working people, it’s for big business. And you know, when you put this out to people, they go ‘oh, well that’s just the way it is’. You know, that kind of thing. So that made me depressed, politics and world situations. [...] But, my philosophy is, you don’t go round with your blinkers on, you learn about it, you know about it, and then you’ve got to find the joie de vivre, what makes you happy to kind of lift yourself out of that, get over it.

In one sense, what Gillian has said – like that of Chris and Eileen – runs counter to the therapeutic discourse of happiness as she attributes some of her unhappiness to a system that exists at the level of society (that is, capitalism). She feels unhappy about the idea that capitalism does not benefit the majority of the population (working people like herself). However, her account also resonates with the therapeutic discourse when she emphasises that coming to such a realisation has turned her into ‘a stronger person’. That is to say,
having an understanding of capitalism has helped Gillian to increase her self-knowledge and to therefore cultivate a better relationship with her self. She also stressed the importance of finding happiness when living in such a society, in order that one is able to 'lift oneself out' of negative thoughts. Thus, unhappiness that is caused by a macro-level process like capitalism may still be dealt with via some kind of technology of the self, or individual-level understanding. Gillian has expressed this by situating herself in both communitarian and therapeutic discourses; many other respondents also drew upon both discourses in tandem, particularly when reflecting upon their interpersonal relationships. This will be shown and explored further later in the chapter.

The interesting thing about these three accounts is that Chris, Eileen and Gillian were the only three respondents to attribute any of their happiness or unhappiness to such society-level concerns; the 'sociality' described by all other respondents – as will be shown in the remainder of this chapter – was centred mainly around that of friends, family and immediate social networks. Thus, it could be said that whilst relationships with others play a major role in people's experiences of happiness, it may specifically be membership of a personal community of friends, relatives or colleagues, which is individuated and self-selected in nature (see Wellman 1979, Pahl 2005) that has a more prominent influence upon the contemporary construction of happiness in late modernity than more worldly or global issues such as capitalism and third-world poverty.

The Importance of Social Relationships

Every individual whom I interviewed talked in some way about the way in which their interpersonal relationships with family and friends played a role in their experiences of
happiness (or indeed, unhappiness); for example, this was the case for Maureen, Gillian and Linda:

**LH: What would you say makes you most happy in life?**

Maureen (80, Female): *That my children are well, and my husband is well, that is the most important thing in my life. My family, that they keep well. That's the most important thing. Family is most important. Health... in the family... health, and their happiness.*

**LH: Why do you think that having money and material things doesn't make us that happy?**

Gillian (46, Female): *Erm... because I think it's relationships that really make you happy... I mean, it's nice to have nice food, and when you get paid you go out and you buy certain things, so... I just think we live now too much in a consumer society, and people's expectations are higher. [...] But I'd say it's experiences, good experiences that make you happy and I think it's actually people that make the experiences.*

Linda (65, Female): *...family things [have made me happy]. I mean, the day... both my children, the day they got married, they were very happy days in my life. Erm... the day my first grandchild was born was a very happy day. Although it was stressful at the beginning [laughs]. It ended up a very happy day! Erm... I look back on days... when I've had a really enjoyable day out with friends or something like that, or a really enjoyable holiday, you know. And I look back on days when my children were little and we did things... had family days out or something... you know, just little things that you remember.*

The individuals giving each of the three accounts above express that for them, relationships and experiences with family and friends are of high importance for the experience of happiness. In a similar vein, other respondents talked about how a lack of interpersonal
relationships may be likely — either for themselves or for others — to induce a feeling of
unhappiness:

Tom (25, Male): I was talking to an ex-girlfriend of mine last week, and she’s earning a good
amount of money and she’s done loads of travelling, and she’s already got a couple of
holidays booked for this year, some really great ones, but she said she was unhappy. How can
you be unhappy? You’ve got the things I want, you’ve got the interesting job, with
responsibility, you get paid decent money, you know, go on holidays... why would she be
unhappy? Well... I know that she hasn’t got as many friends, or her personal life isn’t going
well, she hasn’t got anyone to talk to, she hasn’t really got any close friends around, she’s lost
quite a few friends through moving away or whatever... so it’s all relative I think.

Tom described his ex-girlfriend’s life and expressed surprise at her admission that she felt
unhappy; he speculated that a good job, income and holiday prospects are all factors that
should make a person happy. However, he also recognised that the real source of her
unhappiness was a lack of close friends, thus suggesting that low levels of sociality are likely
to lead to unhappiness, even in seemingly favourable additional circumstances such as a
good income and gainful employment. Beth also talked about how she might feel in a
hypothetical situation in which she had no friends or family:

LH: Do you think we need to have good relationships with friends and family in order to be
happy?

Beth (23, Female): Erm... I feel like I do... I mean, I’ve had this conversation before, where I’ve
thought to myself, if something really terrible happened, like, god forbid, all your family and
all your friends die, I’d like to believe that you’d be able to pick yourself up and continue. But
then, I think you’d have to make new friends... and new family. So yeah, I guess so. I think
people are important... I think if I lived on an island all by myself, I wouldn’t be that happy.
Because I think that’s what life’s about, ultimately... you know, caring about people and having people care about you.

LH: Do you think people with no friends or family could be happy?

Beth (23, Female): I think it would take a special kind of person. Erm, but probably. I don’t know, it’s one of those things where you think on the surface, they might be really happy but then maybe deep down... erm... for somebody like me it would be impossible. I just don’t see the point in living, if it’s just you. I’d be alright if it was just a short-term thing, but if it was forever... no. There’s nobody to share anything with. Yeah, I wouldn’t like it at all. I could live by myself, but I’d have to have people to visit, or... Yeah. I think there’s a lot of sad people that are living on their own for whatever reason... I do think they are sad. I don’t think there are many people out there who are all by themselves that are happy. Well obviously if they’re not completely sane, or something... [laughs], but not with a sane mind and everything else.

Yeah, I think people are the essence of it all. Or even animals, maybe. But it’s still like a living thing... to share things with.

She said that she would be unable to ‘see the point in living’ if she had no family or friends, and felt that people who live alone would be certain to feel unhappy about this; anyone in this position who did not would be likely to be mentally unstable, or lacking a ‘sane mind’, which suggests that the cultivation of relationships with others can be considered as a ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ route to gaining happiness. This can thus also be linked to the naturalness and biological discourses of happiness explored in ‘What is Happiness?’ (Chapter 5), as it is assumed that the experience of happiness is a ‘normal’ part of one’s mental and cerebral functioning. Danielle also gave an account that implied the normalcy of gaining happiness from sociality, when describing her brother’s life:

LH: Do you think that good relationships with friends and family are important?
Danielle (26, Female): I think to most people they are. Obviously, some people are different and they don’t feel such need to have other people and they can feel perfectly happy... without all that. But I think to the vast majority of people, having good relationships and social circumstances helps you be happy. For instance, my brother is very odd. He seems very happy from day to day... but he’s twenty-four and he’s a student, lives at home still, and erm, he really only has one good friend who he’ll see maybe once a week or so, and then apart from that, he just goes into uni, comes straight home, doesn’t socialise with his uni friends, and then he’ll just sit and laugh and joke with my mum and dad [laughs]. And he seems to be perfectly happy doing that! [...] I mean, if I had that existence, I’d be pulling my hair out!

She described her brother as ‘odd’ because he does not have very many friends but nevertheless appears to be happy; she imagined that for herself, being in that situation would lead to unhappiness. Again, like with Beth’s account, this suggests a normative dimension to the forming of relationships; that is, it is considered normal or natural to seek happiness through relationships with friends, and any individual who does not conform to this may be considered ‘abnormal’ by others. Although Danielle situated herself within therapeutic discourse at other points in her interview, when reflecting upon her own happiness, she did not do so here; that is, she did not consider the possibility that her brother’s happiness may come from within his own self, but rather assumed that gaining happiness from relationships with others was the norm.

Many people – when reflecting upon the reasons for why such relationships are an important part of a happy life – described the way in which they are a necessary source of support in helping them to get through their everyday lives. Thus, despite situating themselves within therapeutic discourse and making sense of happiness as something individual and internal (which can be seen in the previous chapter), they nevertheless
emphasised that the provision of social and emotional support from family and friends was a major source of happiness. Chloe and Martin both talked about this:

Chloe (26, Female): I think friends are important, but family is just that foundation, that absolute support network that you bounce off, that I think underlies most of my happiness... I think it underlies most of my confidence that therefore gives me happiness. ‘Cos I know that whatever I do, I’ve got people going ‘yeah, yeah, that’s a great idea, you’re amazing.’ [laughs] And they’re blood, and they also have that constant ‘I’m never going anywhere’... which is, in terms of the unhappiness that may come from isolation or loneliness... I think knowing that there is a group of people that whatever happens, are always going to be there, and have stated that a lot, is invaluable.

Martin (32, Male): ...around Christmas my girlfriend said that she needed to go back to New York, because she’d studied for three years already for her politics degree, she had to do her fourth year but she’d already taken two years out, so she had to go back. But for me it was so very difficult to accept. Because she’d sort of been my rock in many ways... You know, during the job search she was there for me... and during the burglary, her mum lives nearby, she could have gone and slept there where she felt safer but she stayed with me. I would never have been able to stay in that flat by myself, it was an old Victorian flat with two bedrooms, a lot of windows... I would have thought I was stronger but I was scared shitless most of the time. So yeah, and then she was leaving me and I felt like my sort of rock was taken away. And that’s why I’ve felt that the last few months have been really shit.

Chloe described the happiness that she has gained from knowing that her family are there to support her, highlighting specifically that this is a safeguard against any isolation and loneliness which she may feel in their absence, and which would be a source of unhappiness. She also – by positioning herself within therapeutic discourse – expressed that she felt able
to use their support as an aid to increasing her confidence, and thus, working on herself in order to do so, which would have enabled her to strengthen the positive relationship that she may have had with her self.

Martin talked about the way in which his girlfriend had offered him support during a number of adverse or difficult times in his life, such as a burglary and a period of unemployment. He attributed his unhappiness at the time of his interview to her absence (and thus, to the absence of her support). Many other respondents also identified a partner, close friend or family member as being their ‘rock’, or someone in whom they could confide, and talked about the way in which such support was necessary for being happy.

Thus, it appears that there is a discordance or tension between this discourse of sociality and the therapeutic discourse that has been shown to be so central to the construction of happiness. If happiness is something that can be gained from within oneself, by ‘working’ on oneself, then why are close relationships and the provision of emotional support that accompanies these perceived to be so fundamental for a happy life? And why are social networks considered so important in our supposedly individualised society? Might people draw upon the two discourses in tandem, in making sense of their experiences? The sociality discourse in which relationships and social connections are considered so paramount may indeed take on a therapeutic dimension; this will be explored and these questions will be addressed throughout the rest of this chapter.

**Being in love**

Love and intimate relationships were also highlighted by many people as a large source of happiness; all respondents were asked a question on whether they felt that being in love
was important for being happy. Almost every individual talked about how these kinds of relationships (that is, relationships with partners) did – or could potentially – play an important part in their experiences of happiness. For example, Martin talked about the way in which his relationship with his girlfriend had made him feel happier:

Martin (32, Male): ...in some ways I've had more happiness than ever before, exactly because I had - for the first time in my life, like a steady relationship, you know. Two summers ago, I would have gone out and I would have met some girl in a club and dated her for a month and then broken up... and it's not even really a relationship. But ever since I met my current girlfriend, for the first time I had a feeling I'd met somebody who I could connect with. So, despite all of the difficulties there were in the last year, for example, I was burgled, I was in a way intensely happy. [...] When I was a student, I had a Russian flatmate, she was twenty-three, and she had a boyfriend from France, he was much older, forty-five, and she once said to me 'from a certain age, a man needs to be loved'. And I think there's a certain truth in that... like, the fact that there's somebody there for you is a tremendous sort of... support. So yeah, I think a good relationship is something that can make you happy.

For Martin, this kind of a relationship – in which he felt that he connected with someone on an emotional level – made him happier than his previous, short-term relationships with women, which were largely of a sexual nature. It was this added dimension of emotional connection and support that he felt was contributing to his happiness, which he was also able to maintain despite some adverse events – such as a burglary - that he had recently experienced.

Other people made sense of love and intimate relationships by describing the feeling they draw from them as 'better than' or 'exceeding' happiness:
LH: Do you think that being in or falling in love is important for being happy?

Denise (46, Female): Oh, this week I’d say yes! [laughs] Yeah, I mean, I don’t think it’s the only thing, and I think you can be happy if you’re on your own. But... it’s better if you are. It’s a different happiness. Yeah... it’s better, it’s better. I don’t know how I’d define that. But it is more than just happiness. Oh, I feel like I’m twelve again! [squeals and laughs]

LH: In what way is it better?

Denise (46, Female): I don’t know... it is the sharing... as I was saying at the beginning, my son is a large part of what makes me happy, but he needs to go and do his own thing, and I think we’ll pretty much always have a good relationship, but... that’s one sort of love, that’s one sort of closeness. [...] I think being in a relationship with... I mean, for me, a relationship where we are essentially equals, but sometimes he will need more support from me, sometimes I will need more support from him, and it can sort of veer between the two. Being in a relationship, I don’t have to think ‘ooh, I shouldn’t tell you this, I need to find a different friend’, being able to share pretty much any and everything with that one person... that’s all the boxes ticked. And pleasing on the eye! [laughs]. Six foot three...

Denise described being in love as being ‘more than just happiness’, and identified the ability to share her life with her partner as the main reason for this. Describing love in this way, whereby she described feeling like a child or teenager again (and thus, alluding to an ‘imagined’, other world) is linked to the way in which “being in love in some way places the lover outside the mundane, everyday world.” (Jackson, 1993:211). Indeed, Roland Barthes describes this state as ‘disreality’ (Barthes, 1978). Many other respondents also highlighted the ideas of sharing and connection as a fundamental part of relationships. However, the idea that sharing should make a person happy — or indeed, more than just happy — again, runs counter to the way in which the self is produced via therapeutic discourse as an autonomous individual who is able to ‘work on’ or develop a relationship with itself, and it is doing so that can then induce a feeling of happiness. One ought to only find such happiness
from within their self. Thus, why might people also identify love and the sharing of their life with another person as one of the biggest sources of happiness? Do these two discourses relate to one another in any way? How might individuals negotiate and make sense of their relationships with both their selves and with others? These questions will be raised again later in this chapter.

Similarly, others — such as Chris and Eileen — also gave accounts that ran counter to the therapeutic discourse, by describing the feeling of being in love as being ‘complete’ or ‘as one’:

**LH:** Why did [being in love] make you feel so happy?

Chris (46, Male): Because it was the start of stuff, I mean, it was the start of something... there was a lot of newness that was attached to that, there was a lot of... the concept of commitment was really there, erm, the sense of being very complete, in the sense of I think the minute you have children, there’s a sense of completeness that comes in when they’re very young, and your relationship is very young... you know, nothing’s fucked up yet. So it’s like, it’s all pretty good. You’ve got a blank slate, it’s tabula rasa for both. So yeah, that’s why it was such a happy moment. It was like, lord knows where this is gonna go, but I’m enjoying it. [...] I think falling out of love is the most miserable, miserable state that a person can be in, personally.

**LH:** So in what way do you think sexual relationships particularly are important for being happy?

Eileen (63, Female): [...] I think it’s just... the sexual relationship is an important part of being close to one another. And it makes you happy. I think it does anyway. It just makes you realise that you are sort of... as one, if you like. Like two halves of a whole. That is why, when people lose their partner, it’s like half of them goes. It is quite true, it does. I don’t go out anymore in
the evenings because Keith’s not with me. I don’t like being at a party... I mean, I have to be at parties with the family and things like that, and friends... but I don’t like it. Because Keith’s not there. [...] I lost my confidence totally when Keith died, and I cannot... it just feels like it will never be the same again, for me to go out in a group or to a party. It will never be the same again. So I prefer not to go, to be honest.

For Chris, being in the early stages of a loving relationship made him feel ‘complete’; this was particularly applicable to the start of a relationship, before problems begin to arise, and suggests that to be alone, one’s self would be incomplete. He also felt that the end of such a relationship could be the largest potential source of unhappiness for people. Eileen’s account, although in relation to sex, could also be applied to love. She similarly described the way in which one can feel like they and their partner are ‘as one’. It is in this way that the self or subjectivity can be produced through the dominant idea of love as ‘complete’ (or indeed, ‘incomplete’ if one is not in love) (Johnson, 2005:87). In talking about the death of her partner four years previously, she used the language of ‘completeness’ or ‘wholeness’, by describing feelings of loss of confidence, and of one half of herself. The idea that another person can make an individual feel ‘complete’ or ‘whole’ suggests that without that person, the individual or the self is incomplete in some way. In Eileen’s case, positioning herself in this dominant discourse of love and ‘completeness’ leads to the idea that she does not consider herself as an autonomous individual who ‘knows’ herself; rather, she feels that she lacks self-knowledge — and also lacks confidence — because her partner (or a part of her) is no longer there. Thus, on the one hand, the fact that Eileen’s relationship with her partner helped her to feel like a ‘complete’ person suggests that she is positioning herself in a discourse of sociality, that is, one where relationships are paramount, opposing that of the therapeutic. On the other hand however, she talked about herself and her partner within therapeutic discourse, as though they were one self. She expressed unhappiness at her loss
of confidence brought about by her partner’s death, and implied that happiness could be regained if only she were able to reinstate a sense of self-knowledge and a good relationship with herself as one individual, rather than two, in order to thus feel complete again. Therefore, both the sociality and therapeutic discourses have been drawn upon in giving this account of loss.

Beth also situated herself in both the sociality and therapeutic discourses, by giving a rather contradictory account of her ideas about love:

**LH: Do you think being in or falling in love is important for feeling happy?**

Beth (23, Female): Erm... I think that... I mean, really I think that happiness comes from the inside. I think ultimately, you have to make yourself happy, I don’t think a relationship can make you happy. It’s like superficial happiness I think. But... I like being in a relationship, but a good one. But I’m trying to keep my head screwed on, and saying that isn’t the be all and end all. But as long as you have people around you, that do love you, be it friends, be it a relationship... yeah, it’d be alright.

**LH: Have you ever been in love?**

Beth (23, Female): I have! (laughs)

**LH: Did it make you happy?**

Beth (23, Female): Yeah it made me happy, but it’s just the same way as friends make you happy... being loved, loving somebody, laughing together. Yeah, just... having somebody to share things with, and someone that knows you so well as well. You bounce off each other and understand each other, I guess. You felt safe as well. Yeah, safe... it makes bad things go away. You know, say you’re worried about work, or something like that, you’ve got somebody who’s just gonna... take it away.
She started her account by emphasising that it is not possible to gain happiness from a relationship, as happiness comes from the individual as opposed to anything external, thus drawing upon therapeutic discourse, in outlining the importance of self-sufficiency (Hazleden, 2003). However, she then talked about the way in which previous relationships did indeed make her happy; like Denise, it was the sharing aspect of these that were the reason for this. Thus here, she then goes on to position herself within a discourse of sociality. Again then, this raises a question: why has she contradicted herself in such a way? If it is assumed that happiness comes 'from the inside', what role would a loving relationship play in the experience of happiness?

Others highlighted the way in which they draw happiness from intimate relationships because of a diminished need to think about oneself. As Nick commented:

Nick (25, Male): I think people look for meaning to their lives, so if they find someone... Also as well, we're in an age where we're too self-obsessed, we're encouraged to be self-obsessed, we're encouraged to be self-sufficient, you know, we're in the age of cocaine and caffeine, and fast cities and overcrowding, and that puts this fast thing into everyone, so to have someone to care about, to take your mind's eye off yourself, is quite comforting. 'Cos suddenly to have someone to care more about than yourself, makes you feel good about yourself, the fact that you can do that in the first place. Like you go wow, you're amazing, and suddenly you're thinking about them, and you want them to be happy rather than constantly worrying about am I happy, am I happy.

Again, this account suggests opposition to therapeutic discourse; rather than focusing upon the way in which happiness can be found from within oneself, Nick highlighted the way in which happiness can be gained from the idea that one is able to devote their attention to
someone other than oneself, thus resonating with the sociality discourse within which many people have been seen to situate themselves. Indeed, Nick’s conception of having a partner is intimately bound up with sociality here, as he links it with wider social changes and a rapidly changing environment. His account, then, echoes Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s suggestion that love and intimate relationships are sought as a response to modern social fragmentation. They write that “individualization may drive men and women apart, but paradoxically it also pushes them into one another’s arms. As traditions become diluted, the attractions of a close relationship grow.” (1995:33, italics in original). However, as with some of the other accounts presented in this chapter so far, it could be said that the sociality discourse has been combined with that of the therapeutic again here. Whilst Nick talked about the way in which caring for others is a source of happiness, he did so by expressing that ‘it makes you feel good about yourself’, or that it allows for the individual to ‘work’ on themselves and to maximise or further their self-knowledge. He also equates finding a partner with the search for ‘meaning’ to one’s life, which again, is another therapeutic precept. Thus whilst the source of happiness can be made sense of from within a discourse of sociality (where the source is relationships with others), people may nevertheless come to terms with the actual experience of happiness by producing themselves from within a therapeutic discourse.

Overall, then, love and intimate relationships are things considered by most to be positive and associated with happiness (or indeed, something ‘more’ than this, a ‘disreality’ (Barthes, 1978)). However, a contradiction has started to emerge: if happiness is constructed in the contemporary West as something individual, internal and self-orientated, then why do people also emphasise the centrality of social networks and interpersonal relationships to their experiences of happiness? Whilst most people make sense of this by positioning
themselves in a discourse of sociality, in which happiness is gained directly from the connections and the sharing with another individual, some do so by constructing a narrative that stems from both this and the therapeutic discourse. That is to say, that whilst it is acknowledged that connections with others are a source of happiness, people situate themselves within more of a therapeutic discourse when making sense of their actual experiences of happiness, by explaining it as a process that takes place at the level of the individual self, where self-knowledge can be furthered and maximised. Why is it that these two seemingly disparate discourses are being employed in tandem here? If interpersonal relationships are considered so paramount for a happy life, how have individualisation, autonomy and freedom become so highly valued in the contemporary west?

The next two sections of the chapter will further explore the way in which these two discourses are combined in the creation of accounts of happiness, through the themes of sexual relationships and the way in which people deal with both singleness and loneliness.

**Sexual relationships**

Many people identified sexual relationships as a major source of happiness. When asked whether they felt that they were an important aspect of a happy life, many respondents felt that they indeed were, as they involved the satisfaction of a 'natural' desire (thus situating themselves within the naturalness discourse when doing so). Sexual attraction can be considered as a 'natural', biological process (in the same way as happiness itself is) by people who position themselves within a biological discourse. Heterosexual sex is considered to be natural in this way because of the way in which conception and reproduction are seen to be natural and innate needs (Johnson, 2005).
The vast majority of people also made a distinction between sex within an established intimate relationship and sex that takes place outside of such relationships (or ‘casual’ sex), and emphasised that the former type of sex is far more conducive to happiness than the latter. Mark, for instance, talked about his promiscuous past:

**LH: Do you think that sexual relationships are an important aspect of a happy life?**

Mark (41, Male): [long pause] They’re not the be all and end all... in balance, yes they can be a component. But then, when you look at the gay scene as well, often it’s like wham bam quick shag and I’m sorry what did you say your name was again? That’s if you get their name in the first place. Erm... I suppose in many respects... I mean, I’m forty-one, I’m a fairly typical gay man, I’ve been, as I said, round the whole of Babylon, I’ve been very promiscuous in my past... erm, probably the men I’ve had sex with counts to the thousands... [...] I got it completely out of balance, because I used sex as a... tool... for validation. If somebody wanted me, if they wanted me sexually, they still wanted me, therefore I must be a person of worth. And when you try that five, six, seven, even eight times over a weekend, it’s really... it leaves you empty. This is actually where... I’m not shy of sex these days, but I shy away from the casual anonymous encounters because I’m looking for something more special. And now sex for me becomes better with somebody that I... know. So sex is important.

Mark positioned himself in a dominant discourse around sex by emphasising that sex would be more likely to make him happy if it were to take place within an established relationship; he described the feelings brought about by his past experiences of casual sex as negative. Indeed, other respondents also used this discourse in this way. This type of discourse around sex is dominant because it is bound up with the ways in which sexual expression is regulated by normative ideals of love (Johnson, 2005). Beverley Skeggs (1997) suggests that this discourse exists, and is used in order to legitimate particular types of sexual expression, and it is heterosexuality that has produced these. According to Skeggs, people – and in
particular, women - position themselves in such discourses in response to a normative expectation to be 'respectable' and to conform to an image of legitimate heterosexuality.

In describing his past, Mark produced his self in relation to his gay identity, and the happiness that he now hopes to achieve from a long-term relationship is channelled by a desire to move away from what he deems a 'typical' gay lifestyle. Thus, although he seeks a long-term relationship with another man, by positioning himself in this discourse of sex, he expresses a wish to move toward a lifestyle that more closely resembles one of legitimate heterosexuality. He had hoped that his previous casual encounters would have helped to increase his self-worth, but instead it resulted in a feeling of emptiness. Thus, whilst highlighting a desire to be in a long-term relationship at present, he has also positioned himself within therapeutic discourse by making sense of the desired outcome of sex as that which would impact upon his sense of self and which would allow him to work on himself. The anonymous sexual encounters in which he took part in the past resulted in a loss of self-knowledge, thus rendering his relationship with his self 'weakened'.

Like Mark, Sophie also asserted that casual sex is a potential source of unhappiness:

*LH*: What about casual sex, outside of relationships, do you think that can make people happy?

Sophie (22, Female): I think it makes people unhappy. I think people who constantly have one night stands are obviously looking for something that they're not going to find from a one-night stand. Sometimes you'll meet someone, you'll get on, there'll be chemistry, you'll have a one-night stand, but it's like you're meant to be anyway. Well not always. But people who are serial one-night stand people, I think obviously something's missing in their lives and they're doing it to.... I don't know, as a way of... finding themselves somehow, and I don't think it
makes them happy. You know, sometimes people want something meaningful, and they just
never have had...

Although Sophie had not experienced casual sex, she speculated that those who have might
expect to ‘find themselves’, or “form a healthy relationship with the self” (Hazleden,
2003:421) (as Mark indeed did). Her account implies that sex within a relationship would be
more ‘meaningful’, and may be a more optimum route to ‘finding’ oneself, or increasing
one’s self-knowledge. Again, then, Sophie positioned herself within the same dominant
discourse as Mark; as a heterosexual woman, she sought to conform to a model of
‘respectability’ and legitimate heterosexuality (Skeggs, 1997) in replaying this discourse. In
doing so, she expressed the idea that sex should be equated with intimacy and love, and it is
only when this is the case that sex is ‘meaningful’ (Johnson, 2005). It is this model of sexual
expression that – according to this discourse – is most conducive to happiness.

Sophie, then, positioned herself within both a discourse of sociality and therapeutic
discourse in this account; she expressed at another point in her interview that she would like
to be in a long-term relationship, thus situating herself within a discourse of sociality, but by
making sense of sex as a means of self-expression (whereby one can ‘find themselves’), she
also situated herself within therapeutic discourse.

Lizzie also expressed the idea that sex which is equated with love is the form of sexual
expression most conducive to happiness, and felt that any potential ‘casual’ sexual
experiences would result in a loss of self-confidence:

LH: What is it about [one-night-stands] that wouldn’t make you happy?
Lizzie (25, Female): Well I think it would make me less confident in trying to find the person who I would really want to be with, and also I’d lose confidence in myself. I think that having relationships like that back to back... almost downplays how I think that men should be. If I am constantly meeting these people, these guys who only want to sleep with you once or sleep with you twice, after a while, I’d just get this image in my head that that’s what all guys are like. And I don’t think that’s the way that I want to... portray the opposite sex. [...] Having a sexual relationship with someone you love is the most amazing thing, and so I don’t think that... I mean I can’t obviously say I’m perfect in all respects or anything, but I guess at the end of the day that’s what I want, and so I think if I’m going to sleep around a lot, I think that would have a detrimental effect on my long-term goal.

Lizzie, again, replayed the dominant discourse of sex that is characterised by the association of sex and love, and said that she would lose confidence if she ever failed to conform to such a model of 'legitimate' heterosexual expression. Thus, she also situated herself within therapeutic discourse in this account; she described her perceptions of casual sex in terms of its detrimental impact upon her sense of self and on her ability to find the 'right' partner, which she considered to be a long-term goal and thus something that she was able to work at. Whilst she also felt that sex that takes place within a loving relationship was the form of sexual expression most conductive to happiness, for her it was also an act that was able to affect her confidence, self-perception and self-knowledge.

So for Mark, Lizzie and Sophie, sexual expression that is bound up with love is that which is most likely to lead to happiness. That is to say, that when positioning oneself within this dominant discourse of sex and happiness, happiness is most commonly brought about, produced or experienced in relation to a conformity to models of legitimate heterosexual expression (Skeggs 1997, Johnson, 2005).
Martin, on the other hand, positioned himself within a discourse opposed to that of Mark, Sophie and Lizzie, in reporting a more positive experience of casual sex (though he was one of the only respondents to do so):

Martin (32, Male): I came back to [home country] for another four years and as a trainee in a law firm I didn't have any fun, I just worked, I didn't have many friends. I had a girlfriend once in a while but I don't think I'd satisfied very much my ambitions as a man, in terms of women. So I came here, and yeah, go out so much and you can have tons of girlfriends, so you sort of feel like you compensate for what you feel you might have been missing. But yeah... maybe I overcompensated, as people often do. I remember one time, I even had two girlfriends at the same time, I remember once in the summer, I woke up with one girl and I went to bed with another one in the evening. And in a way that made me feel good. Something now I wouldn't even have the strength for, or the desire. But back then, it did. And you know, maybe it's something you have to do as a man.

Despite his account being different to the three presented above in terms of its positive aspect, there are also similarities. He highlighted the way in which sex as an activity brought him happiness – both casual sex, and sex with his long-term girlfriend, which he talked about at another point during his interview – and he thus situated himself within a discourse of sociality. Moreover, he also positioned himself within therapeutic discourse by making sense of casual sex as a means of the satisfaction of ambitions, of expression of his masculinity, and therefore of his self and identity. Thus again, through sex, Martin was able to work on himself and maximise his self-knowledge.
The idea that casual sex is inferior to sex within an established relationship appears to be the dominant discourse that people use with regard to sexual relationships; indeed, Martin was the only respondent to provide positive reflections upon casual sex. He did not express a wish to conform to a model of heterosexual feminine 'respectability', and instead, expressed his heterosexual masculinity. However, it may be the case that other respondents may also have felt this; indeed, as Lizzie and Sophie suggest, it is an activity that people do engage in. Nevertheless, there is a dominant discourse around sexual relationships that people may replay in an attempt to come across in a more 'respectable' light.

People's accounts of their perceptions of sexual relationships very much echoed that of the first three accounts presented here; largely, sex within established intimate relationships, and which was associated with love, was considered as more conducive to happiness than casual sex, as happiness here is inextricably bound up with a conformity to legitimate heterosexual expression. It was this normative discourse that most people were seen to replay. Further, all of the above four accounts (as well as many others that were given on this subject) assumed a particular relationship with and conception of the self; sex was conceived of not only in terms of a relationship with another individual (whether physical, intimate, emotional or all three) – and thus experiences of happiness were made sense of via a discourse of sociality - but also via therapeutic discourse, in which it was considered a 'technology of the self' in which one was able to further their relationship with their self - or indeed weaken, in the case of casual sex for some people. Indeed, it was the emotional component of sex within established relationships (which casual sex is seen to lack) that enabled this relationship to be maximised; a lack of emotional connection led to the weakening of this relationship.
Absent relationships: loneliness and singleness

As we have seen in previous sections of this chapter, therapeutic discourse is increasingly pervasive in people’s accounts of their interpersonal relationships; whilst such relationships are central to their experiences of happiness, many make sense of these from an individualised, self-orientated perspective. Despite its pervasiveness, being alone – in cases of both loneliness and singleness – was talked about by many people as one of the biggest sources of unhappiness. For instance, Linda speculated that people who have few or no friends or family are likely to be less happy than those who do:

LH: Do you think one needs to have good relationships with friends and family in order to be happy?

Linda (65, Female): Yes. Yes, I do. I think people I know that haven’t got much family or haven’t got many friends are more unhappy than people who do. I suppose family are always there, even if you’re not getting on too well with them. Family are there whether you like it or not! Nothing changes that hard relationship that is your family, and you sort of get together really. I don’t know, I’m just very lucky I think, with mine... I haven’t got lots of family, but the ones I’ve got I’m really lucky with actually. And they’re all easy to get on with. Friends... I don’t know, maybe it’s because I haven’t got lots of family, I do have a lot of friends. And because I live on my own I have lots of friends, and so you know, I think that’s quite important, yeah. And I think that makes you happy. [...] I need friends and I need people to talk to, but I don’t think everyone’s like that. And I think some people are quite happy... just living their life without lots of friends. You know, people who are recluses. I don’t think I recognise their happiness, but I suspect they’re happy in their own way. I think it depends on the personality.
Being with family and friends was a major source of happiness for Linda; she felt that having people around with whom she could talk was a necessity. Whilst she recognised that this may not be the case for everyone, she felt unable to understand how anybody with no social network could be happy. She situated herself in the naturalness discourse of happiness, by making sense of the happiness of recluses (by attributing this to a natural, fixed aspect of their personalities), but her account also illustrates the normative nature of sociality. Like with that of Danielle’s account on page 177, her inability to understand how such people could be happy – again - suggests that the cultivation of relationships with others is considered a ‘normal’ route to gaining happiness.

Gillian also highlighted the way in which she feels that loneliness is a source of unhappiness for people, and felt lucky that the fact that she is a twin meant that she had never had to experience this:

Gillian (46, Female): I think being a twin, actually, has helped me, because when people talk about loneliness, I have to say, I don’t know what it is, I’ve never been lonely. People say ‘yeah, but you don’t live together’, but when you’re a twin, it’s hard to explain, it’s like you’ve always got somebody there with you, you know? So that’s something I’ve never had. Yeah, that’s another thing, loneliness, especially in cities. That makes people very unhappy. [...] I felt terrible when someone told me that the old man who lived opposite my block had been dead in his flat for three weeks, and I thought oh my god, nobody around knew, how awful is that? You hear about these things... But I was working full-time, I was never around during the day, do you know what I mean, so I wasn’t going to be the person calling on him, but it does make you feel a bit shitty afterwards, you just think god, you’re living in a block with sixty people, and nobody realised he was dead, that’s kind of... and then you start thinking ‘oh my god, maybe I’ll end up like that’, you know!
She recognised that loneliness is an increasingly large problem in cities, and illustrated this by expressing sympathy for her neighbour who had no family or friends who were able to visit him. However, Gillian’s account also contains an interesting contradiction; on the one hand, she talks about how being a twin means that she feels as though she has ‘always got somebody there’, and this for her is a source of happiness. However, as can be seen from earlier points in the thesis, Gillian also makes sense of some of her experiences of happiness via therapeutic discourse; thus, despite the fact that she feels as though she is never alone, she nevertheless conceives of happiness via an individualised and self-orientated conception of everyday life. This once again raises a question: if relationships with others are so fundamental to the experience of happiness, why is it made sense of via such an individualised discourse?

Loneliness was also described as a source of unhappiness by Laurence, who talked about his solution to this problem:

LH: Do you feel happy about your life generally?
Laurence (65, Male): I feel a lot more contented. If you’d asked me that question last year, I would have been completely different, my mum died, and there were things that led up to it...
No, I’m beginning to feel more contented. A little bit lonely though, I don’t like loneliness. But it’s up to me to do that, I think at the age of sixty-five, I’m hoping I can let it pass me by. That’s the reason I joined this club, it’s given me a great deal of happiness. There’s a lot of people there who have experienced what I’ve experienced. [...] And being accepted more, you know. You feel like you can go up there and you don’t have to hedge about your bets because you don’t need to worry about how they’ll react when you say ‘oh by the way, I’m gay.’ ‘Oh, are you?’ Then you feel threatened because that person doesn’t know what to say. And then
you think perhaps you should have kept your big mouth shut. But going to that club, you
don’t... that’s one big barrier you’ve got over, you know, because everyone else there’s in the
same position as you are.

Laurence described the LGBT group of which he is a member, and the way in which he had
gained happiness from meeting others who had had similar experiences to himself through
this. Joining the group had helped him to make new friends, but it also helped him to feel
more accepted as a gay man; knowledge that others were in the same position and accepted
his identity was, for him, a big source of happiness. His account thus again points to the
perceived importance of both being part of a community and knowing that others have the
same experiences as oneself. Once more then, the question can be raised: if loneliness is
such a problem and a source of unhappiness (and ties with others seen to be able to remedy
this), then why is happiness simultaneously conceived of in terms of an individual-level,
internal process?

A number of people also talked about unhappiness that they have experienced – or could
potentially experience – as a result of being single, or not in an intimate relationship. Chris
expressed sympathy for people who had never experienced falling in love:

Chris (46, Male): I always feel sorry for people who haven’t fallen in love. I can only judge it
for myself... but to me, being in love, even if it’s just for, I don’t know, a couple of months, a
year, it’s worth it for the enjoyment I’ve got out of that, the contentment that I’ve got out of
that... like that expression, better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. I
think that’s quite true, I do think it’s quite true. Because the thing is, you’re born alone and
you die alone. So the idea that you can actually be concerned, and be invested in someone to
the degree that being in love with someone — being truly in love with someone — is a huge cause for joy.

Indeed, Lizzie described the way in which being single makes her feel unhappy:

Lizzie (25, Female): I guess the only thing that gets me down is the relationship side of things. I feel as though... at the moment I've been single for a while, and trying to find somebody, I've just found that to be really quite a difficult, daunting task as well. Erm, I've got a couple of friends of mine who have recently got into relationships, they're really happy... and I don't see that almost... to make me sad, obviously! But the less time I get to spend with them, I kind of reflect back on the fact that because of that, I'm not in a relationship, you know.

LH: Do you think if you were in a relationship, or if you met somebody soon, you'd feel happier?

Lizzie (25, Female): I think so. I mean, not saying anybody, you know! But someone who I'd really like to be with, definitely. I think there are so many couples out there that just look as though... I can almost see how happy they are in themselves, and being around the other person, because... either they've met their match, or they complement each other so well. That's also a kind of goal that I have in life... at some stage I do want to get married and at some stage I do want to have children. So I like to think that within the grand scheme of things, to have somebody there at the end of the day would make me more happy. [...] just having somebody there for even a physical or a sexual relationship as well, is really healthy. And obviously, someone that you love and that you have that intimacy with and that you can share things with and... you know, just having that moral support at the end of the day. That's a really important part of life.

For Lizzie, having an intimate relationship with another individual is healthy; in other words, she positions herself within the naturalness discourse by considering it 'normal' to be in a
relationship and expects that this would be a route to gaining happiness, particularly as many of her friends have done so. This resonates with the literature on singleness—particularly amongst women—in which singleness has been shown to have a stigmatised, inferior status, whilst heterosexual couples occupy a more privileged position in western heteronormative culture (Budgeon, 2008). Despite understanding that it is a connection with and support from another person that would bring about a feeling of happiness (and thus situating herself within a discourse of sociality), she recognises that people who are in relationships are each happy in themselves as individuals, which again, suggests that she makes sense of the potential experience of happiness that she could gain from such a relationship via therapeutic discourse.

Mark, like Lizzie, also disliked being single, and felt that his happiness depended upon his meeting ‘Mr Right’:

**LH: What would you say makes you most happy in life?**

Mark (41, Male): Oh god... I think it’s this unobtainable—or what feels to be unobtainable—happy relationship. I’ve been very unlucky, so my happiness is dependent on whether I’ve met somebody or not. And if it goes well, or not. I suppose I’m by and large content if there isn’t anybody there, and then the happiness if somebody very special, then it kind of goes off the scale and then it all goes horribly, horribly wrong, which it always does, the happiness comes crashing back down and then I have to struggle to get back up to the content level. Erm, so that’s a big part of the happiness in my life. It’s dependent on meeting Mr Right!

**LH: What is it about having a good relationship that you think would make you happy?**

Mark (41, Male): I suppose my background... I haven’t been diagnosed with Asperger’s, but it would be unlikely for me not to have it, given the fact that it runs rampant in my family... since childhood I’ve always been a loner. And... I’ve had to work hard on interpersonal
relationships, and on the gay scene particularly, it’s very difficult anyway, at the best of times... and then my family background as well hasn’t been the best. So it’s just the ideal, I think it’s that element of love and being loved, nurturing... feeling secure, providing security for somebody. It also helps if they’re a big hunk! But yeah, it’s that element of... the special. And even the mundane, and by mundane I mean the grocery shopping... or coming home from work and saying ‘hey honey, how was your day?’.

Thus, for Mark, despite the fact that he finds interpersonal relationships difficult, his account nevertheless suggests that for him, they are necessary; he does not have good relationships with many members of his family, and therefore feels that he needs an intimate relationship with a partner, and the security that this would bring to compensate for this. He expresses this need by positioning himself within a discourse of romance; Wendy Langford comments that romantic love “should be understood as a narrative which ‘seduces’ individuals to invest emotionally in the ‘religion of love’, through the promise that entry into an exclusive union will deliver them from their ‘spiritual’ ills.” (Langford, 1999:35-6). Thus, love, in this way, can be considered as something that has the potential to alleviate feelings of unhappiness.

For both Mark and Lizzie (as well as the for the vast majority of the other respondents who were single), the idea of being in love or in a relationship with another person, and the feelings and emotional security that accompany this, are considered to be very desirable, and being single is not a status from which it is considered that one can gain happiness. This is indeed likely to be the case in the general population, as can be seen with the growing popularity of online dating sites and singles’ events. So why are such feelings desired by so many people? Why do people need emotional connection, love and security? And if – according to therapeutic discourse – we are autonomous, self-reliant individuals who are able to take control over our experiences of happiness, then what kind of a role should
interpersonal relationships play in such experiences? The following section will attempt to address these questions.

The key to happiness: sociality or autonomy?

Thus, whilst it is clear that interpersonal, intimate and sexual relationships are all an important part of people's experiences and perceptions of happiness, as economists suggest, a major tension is also evident in people's accounts of these; on the one hand, it is considered as something that is experienced by the individual. One possesses a certain degree of personal autonomy and they are able to manipulate and 'work' on their self in order to control and monitor their experiences of happiness. On the other hand, as can be seen in this chapter, social networks and interpersonal relationships are seen to be equally important aspects of such experiences; it is emotional connections and relationships with others that are considered to be the ultimate source of happiness. Why does such a contradiction exist? Why should interpersonal relationships play such a crucial role in the experience of happiness in our seemingly individualised, therapeutic society?

It is clear that therapeutic culture is that which people have been socialised into, as it is this dominant discourse within which most situate themselves when making sense of their experiences of happiness. Indeed, much work has also been done on illustrating the process of individualisation that western society has witnessed in recent decades (Bauman 2001, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001, Furedi 2004). The self-help movement (that is, books that advise their readers on self-improvement, as well as the 'psy' expertise that surrounds it more generally) is one major aspect of therapeutic culture. The therapeutic discourse that is employed in these texts and by these 'experts' is based upon the idea that self-examination and confession are means by which 'truth' is obtained (Rimke, 2000). These precepts are,
therefore, self-orientated (as, indeed, is therapeutic discourse more generally). Because they are founded upon the belief that 'truth' resides within the individual, the idea that such self-examination is intimately bound up with something that is inherently social and exists outside the self – that is, the political programmes of advanced neoliberal democracies, and with the production of selves who are 'effective' citizens (Rose, 1996) - seems remarkably discordant with this. Indeed, "self-help 'expertise' serves to undermine collective formations and the essential interdependencies of selves." (Rimke, 2000:70). In other words, aspects of therapeutic discourse (namely, self-help expertise), which is one of the dominant discourses within which people position themselves when producing their accounts of happiness, serve to obscure the aspects of human existence that is interdependent, intersubjective, and social. This tension that appears to characterise people's accounts of happiness in relation to interpersonal relationships, then, may be a result of this process. People may nevertheless have a desire to forge connections and relationships with others and to be politically and socially engaged, against a backdrop of self-sufficiency and self-examination that are central tenets of therapeutic discourse. Romance is promoted as a 'haven' from personal ills (Langford, 1999), and people seek happiness through loving and sexual relationships, by conforming to models of legitimate sexual expression (Skeggs, 1997), but they nevertheless make sense of this through a discourse in which the needs of the self are paramount.

Although therapeutic discourse is a dominant mode by which people understand happiness, it could be suggested that such an individualised culture may not necessarily be a purely positive thing. As Erich Fromm (1942) has postulated, freedom and autonomy are two of the most central and important values of contemporary social life (and indeed, 'personal freedom' is an additional one of the 'Big Seven' causes of happiness identified by Layard). However, according to Fromm, these may pose a burden on individuals, whereby they may
be met with feelings of isolation, powerlessness and insecurity. That is to say that whilst medieval social systems were organised in such a way that everybody knew their place in society, and thus offered stability and relative security, the advent of capitalism, Fromm argued, instilled a feeling of uncertainty as each individual’s position depended purely upon their own personal effort. Furthermore, this is still the case in contemporary capitalist society as individuals – particularly in urban locales – are overwhelmed by their environment (see Simmel, 1903) and thus experience a feeling of powerlessness and aloneness. Individuals are not necessarily aware of these feelings as they go about their daily lives; indeed, the respondents whom I interviewed did not explicitly claim to have had such experiences. However, many did express a wish for security and a need for this from a loving relationship; they also expressed a sense of unhappiness with regard to singleness and loneliness, and thus it may be so that their desire and need for interpersonal relationships, and their association of these with happiness, is the means through which they seek to cope with these feelings of isolation.

Fromm suggests that one way in which they may deal with these problematic feelings is by seeking some kind of guidance in life. For some people, this is done through religion, a belief in God and in religious values. Others would rely on guidance and support from friends, relatives or partners; indeed, many respondents talked about this and data presented earlier in this chapter illustrate this. It could even be argued that people’s adoption of ‘therapeutic’ and self-help precepts via their use of therapeutic discourse is a means of feeling more ‘guided’, as this is a body of knowledge and ideas that can be drawn upon in order to make sense of and understand one’s own identity and their life and experiences.
Another mechanism of escape from these feelings that Fromm has identified is a striving for either submission to or domination of another individual or object; it could be argued that this is achieved via intimate relationships. Indeed, many respondents expressed that the happiness that they derived from intimate relationships largely stemmed from the sense of security that these offered (and the respondents who were single similarly talked about a desire of such security from hypothetical relationships), and thus it is these relationships that can act as a safeguard against feelings of isolation and powerlessness. Submitting to or dominating over another person is, for Fromm, a way of coping with such feelings because they are means by which one can alter their sense of self (1942). By submitting to another person, an individual attempts to lose his or her self, as he or she attempts to become part of a larger, more powerful being; by dominating over a person, the self is strengthened. The self may never be completely lost, as people maintain an acknowledgement of their relationships with it when drawing upon therapeutic discourse; nevertheless, by seeking to alter one's sense of self in an intimate relationship, one is able to regain the sense of security that they may otherwise lose in an individualised society. Furthermore, it is this need for the eradication of these negative feelings that is the source of the happiness that people gain from interpersonal (and intimate) relationships.

Thus, happiness may be derived from interpersonal relationships because these may be one possible route via which security can be gained in an otherwise insecure, uncertain and individualised world. However, it is this individualised world which lies at the foundation of the therapeutic culture that so many are socialised into and which is so widely drawn upon when making sense of one's experiences of happiness. Therefore one can conclude that the construction of happiness in Western societies does indeed lie at the intersection between sociality and therapeutic discourses, and that the tension between these two discourses that
has been evidenced and displayed throughout this chapter is fundamental; whilst happiness is ultimately considered to be an individual-level experience that is made sense of in terms of one’s relationship with their self, interpersonal relationships nevertheless play a crucial role in this experience as they mediate one’s relationship with their self and are a necessary safeguard against the insecurity and powerlessness that characterise individualised capitalist societies in the twenty-first century. Thus, Layard’s identification of ‘family relationships’ and ‘community and friends’ as two of the most important ‘Big Seven’ determinants of happiness may indeed have currency here; however, his further identification of ‘personal freedom’ as a cause may need to be considered in tandem with these, rather than as two discrete factors.
Chapter 8
Orientations to Money, Working Life and Happiness

This chapter provides an analysis of the ways in which people perceive the relationship between money and wealth and their experiences of happiness, as well as the ways in which happiness (or indeed, unhappiness) is experienced in their working lives. ‘Financial situation’ and ‘work’ were two of the four most important ‘Big Seven’ causes of happiness identified by Richard Layard (2005: 63), as well as by other economists, and people’s accounts of these will thus – as with the preceding chapter – be examined. A number of questions will be raised: how do people position themselves within particular discourses when giving accounts of such things, and which discourses are available to them? In what ways do they produce their selves when doing so? And more fundamentally, how might they use therapeutic discourse to produce these particular accounts and perceptions?

The chapter will first consider people’s perceptions of the relationship between money and happiness, and in particular, their reflections on whether money and wealth are important for a happy life, which Layard (2005) indeed found was the case, particularly in terms of social comparison, or having as much as or more than others. Many respondents used the term ‘materialism’ in talking about this, which was a term they used to refer to a desire for money and material possessions, and an accompanying expectation that happiness would be gained from the accumulation of this. The term shall be used in this chapter to refer to this idea. The discourses within which people situate themselves in terms of their perceptions of the relationship between this and happiness will thus be explored. How might people produce their selves through their accounts and these discourses? And in what way does therapeutic culture ‘frame’ this self-production and the way in which certain types of selves
may be accorded value? The *classed* nature of these accounts, as well as the production of middle class selves will also be explored.

It will then go on to explore people’s accounts of the happiness, as well as the unhappiness that they associate with their working lives. People position themselves within particular discourses, namely *therapeutic* discourse when talking about work; this will be examined via analysis of their accounts of their feelings of personal *fulfilment* and *achievement*. They also draw upon their experiences of work in order to attempt to ‘work’ on their selves so as to self-actualise and generate self-knowledge. However, are the cultural resources and practices with which this ‘work’ is performed accessible to all, or only to those occupying particular structural positions? The way in which such accounts of fulfilment are bound up with, and are expressions of, classed aesthetics (Bourdieu, 1986a) will be explored, as will the way in which selves are produced through discourse around working life.

The chapter will start with an examination of people’s accounts of their orientations to money and happiness.

**Consumption: a problem?**

Each respondent was asked about whether they feel that money is important for happiness. All of them talked in some way about the way in which having a lot of money is a negative thing, and thus is not conducive to happiness.

The idea that the consumption of material goods has a stronger presence in contemporary British or Western society than in any other place or at any other time-point was highlighted by some respondents. Mark, for instance, compared Western cultures to that of the East:
LH: Do you think that the idea of happiness is different across cultures?

Mark (41, Male): Erm... [pause] yes, I think it is, actually. Western culture is very much consumer-driven, I think it's the worship of money, money will buy you happiness. Eastern cultures... not that I'm by any means an expert, but they are more spiritual, and happiness comes from within. Peace kind of thing. I think it's very different in different cultures.

Mark – like many other respondents – did not subscribe to the idea that 'money will buy you happiness' himself, and he talked about this at another point during his interview. However, he identified this as an overall view of much of the rest of society, and juxtaposed this with the Eastern, more spiritual view, in which happiness is seen to come 'from within'. His quote thus suggests that happiness does not come 'from within' for most people in the West, as they would draw it from 'external', material goods. A paradox has therefore emerged: as illustrated in Chapter 6, many people situate themselves within 'therapeutic discourse' when giving accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness. That is to say, happiness is considered to be a very individual experience, and many people do indeed express that it comes 'from within', despite the fact that all respondents came from Western cultural backgrounds. So why might people (including Mark himself) appear to be subscribing to such an 'Eastern' conception that Mark has put forward?

It seems that a 'materialistic' outlook on life (that is, one whereby money and possessions are perceived as conducive to happiness) is at odds with 'therapeutic culture'. Whilst therapeutic culture promotes the idea of the individual drawing happiness from within him- or herself (like the 'Eastern' conception that Mark mentions), a 'materialistic' person would supposedly draw it from material goods that exist outside the self. It is thus in this vein that all respondents describe consumption in negative terms (which will be shown in more detail.
in this chapter); reliance upon factors external to the self for one's happiness would run
counter to the precepts of therapeutic discourse, whereby the importance of self-sufficiency
of the individual is upheld (Hazleden, 2003), as well as contradict the ancient Greek principle
of needing a 'balanced' soul that is free of any interference from external or material factors
(Plato, 380BC/1998). Thus, if it is therapeutic culture through which people produce their
accounts of happiness, it could be argued that the expression of such a 'non-materialist'
view is very much in accordance with – and is furthermore an aspect of - therapeutic
discourses of happiness.

Thus, many respondents did express a 'non-materialist' view, by talking about the way in
which material things may not bring about happiness. For example, as Chloe and Lizzie both
said:

**LH:** Do you think that amassing material goods doesn't lead to increased happiness?

Chloe (26, Female): *I don't think your happiness should come from external... motivations, or
material goods, or people... I think they can, and you'll probably get happy for a bit, but if you
rely on that, you can always come back down again. I think it should always be an internal
sort of... steadiness, and motivation, because that will never go, that voice inside you will
never go... whereas Manolo Blahniks will go out of season [laughs]. I mean, I'm saying this
but if I go out tomorrow and buy a really cute All Saints jacket, I'd be really pleased. But I try
and personally concentrate myself on having an inner happiness where the outside events are
good and bad, because I know that's the thing that will always be there. And I know so many
people who are incredibly... wealthy, in terms of material and aren't happy, because of
searching... always feeling that their worth is in outside things. I know people who are very
wealthy and are happy, but I know that's because they've always been happy, when they
were striving for it as well.*
LH: Do you think consumerism makes people happy?

Lizzie (25, Female): Er... to some extent, yes... because I think that's just a general way of life. People spend so much time, you know, these days shopping, and being shown adverts on TV, a lot through the media as well, and you get a lot of pressure into feeling... that these are the things that should make you feel happy. And it does, to some extent, it definitely works... we get so much advertising that we're often not even aware of to show you things... products, that will actually improve your happiness. And you're naturally going to feel that way, as if yeah, if I do get such and such, I'm going to feel better about my life. I think that generally does have a large impact on... I guess on the world that we live in, and our expectations of happiness.

LH: Would you say that's the case for you personally as well?

Lizzie (25, Female): [laughs] Well I always like to think that I'm an exception to the rule! I don't... I spend maybe, in comparison to the people that I know, a lot less time buying new things, and a lot more time either... outdoors or travelling, or often at the gym and things like that. So that's what makes me happy. Then again, I can't deny the fact that I like a good bargain, or I like to find something that's a bit special...

Thus, for Chloe, her expression of a non-materialistic view is indeed very much interwoven with therapeutic discourse; she likens happiness to a 'voice inside you', whereby the body – once again – is likened to a 'container' for one's happiness (see Lupton, 1998), and suggests that this more individually-derived, cerebral and self-sufficient experience is a more 'reliable' means of gaining happiness (see Hazleden, 2003), rather than drawing upon 'external motivations' like material goods. Lizzie's account alludes less to therapeutic discourse; however, both she and Chloe highlight the way in which they deviate from the widespread view held by others whom they know that consumption can provide happiness. On the other hand, they both acknowledge that they – despite deviating from this view - derive pleasure from buying new things; this is a commonly expressed attitude, as "shopping and all the
associated activities [...] are generally represented, and indeed often experienced, as pleasurable, as enjoyable." (Smart, 2010:144). They therefore do this whilst simultaneously recognising a negative dimension of consumption, whereby it may bring about dissatisfaction and debt (Schwartz, 2005).

Another layer of complexity is thus added to the paradox highlighted above, by the fact that people (like Chloe and Lizzie) claimed that they were not ‘materialistic’. If, as they say, so many other Westerners are so consumption-orientated, then why do all of my (Western) respondents claim not to hold such a view? Why are people situating themselves in this dominant discourse of materialism and happiness? It is unlikely that twenty-six individuals who happened to be more ‘therapeutic’ than ‘materialistic’ were recruited by coincidence; so why do people produce their accounts and make sense of their selves in such a way?

It is through the idea of difference that people make sense of, or produce their selves here; they are associating themselves with a ‘non-materialist’ identity, which is an identity or position that many other members of society are not seen to occupy. Lizzie, for instance, expresses this difference by saying that she is ‘an exception to the rule’ and thus sees herself as different from her counterparts in that she does not need to consume to be happy. ‘Materialism’, then, is not something real or absolute, but rather it is a social construct that people are using to produce their own selves through this discourse of ‘difference’. The constitution of the self thus hinges upon the comparison of oneself to a ‘materialistic other’ in these accounts. It is this constitution of the self that is central to the dominant therapeutic discourse of happiness.
Additionally, one could also adopt concepts from Bourdieu’s work on the ‘symbolic economy’ (Bourdieu, 1986a) and argue that a ‘non-materialist’ view or outlook accrues or is attributed with symbolic capital, or value (and thus, a materialistic view would be seen to lack value). Thus, people like Chloe and Lizzie (as well as most other respondents), in situating themselves in non-materialistic discourse, display particular characteristics and dispositions that correspond with this, which they are shown to do here through talk and narrative. Other respondents performed this by physically demonstrating in the face-to-face interview context the ways in which happiness was better achieved without material goods: Martin (32, Male) stated that ‘I don’t wear a Rolex’, before displaying his less expensive watch, Gillian (45, Female) told me that she has ‘never been a person who likes to wear jewellery’, and Mark (41, Male) talked - almost proudly - about his television that was in the room in which his interview took place: ‘for the benefit of the tape, my TV has a postage-stamp size screen, it’s tiny!’ So it is also through displaying and embodying these characteristics in this way that people use the idea of ‘materialism’ to produce selves of higher value.

People are also producing middle class selves through these accounts. Describing oneself as uninterested in large amounts of money, and comparing oneself to those who are is intimately linked with the expression of a middle class aesthetic which Bourdieu (1986a) highlights in his critique of Kant’s Critique of Judgement. Middle class people who share this aesthetic see themselves as having ‘good taste’ and as having the capacity to appreciate the ‘truly beautiful’; they express this in comparison to those who only have an appreciation of simple pleasures (or, a ‘facile aesthetic’), which anyone is considered to be able to appreciate. These people are not seen to be tasteful, and those who can only appreciate these pleasures are seen by the middle class to be excessive and tasteless. Thus, by
demonstrating that they do not like to spend more money on certain goods than is necessary, these respondents are expressing a middle class aesthetic and are, in turn, producing middle class selves.

The idea of value is also intertwined with the idea of *morality* – many respondents, in producing themselves through discourse in relation to the ‘materialistic other’, make sense of the non-materialistic stance as superior to this, or as the ‘right’ or more moral stance to take to happiness. Indeed, Linda’s response to being asked what would make her happier was illustrative of this:

**LH:** If you could be given anything to make you feel happy or happier right now, what would it be?

Linda (65, Female): *Money I think. It sounds very mercenary, doesn’t it! But I’ve just been watching the news, and the state of the country... I think one of the things that... I mean, although I’m quite happy, I don’t feel I’ve got... oh, this sounds pathetic actually, I feel guilty saying this... but I don’t think I’ve got an enormous amount of financial security. And I think more would help me... I really feel guilty saying that, because I’ve got a roof over my head that belongs to me, so I’m not... but I just think more money, really. And I think I’d really be happy if I had lots more money, because then I could help my children out, you know, ‘cos they’re struggling a bit. You know... because my daughter-in-law’s just been made redundant, and if I had more money, I could sort of help them a little bit. And my daughter’s not very well off either... I just think I could help them, yeah, yeah.*

Linda expressed a feeling of guilt about saying that she needed more money, and described her admission as ‘pathetic’. She may have felt like this because identification with a more ‘materialistic’ identity in this way meant, for her, that she was identifying with a disposition
considered to be of little use-value, and furthermore, of no moral value, which she would have felt reluctant to display. Additionally, she then went on to explain that money would make her happier because it would enable her to offer her children financial assistance; this may have been a further attempt to display particular characteristics both to myself as the interviewer as well as to herself that pertain to the idea that she is not a truly 'materialistic' person, as she draws happiness from spending money on others, which she may have considered as more moral than spending on herself. Again then, this account demonstrates the way in which Linda produced her self through discourse and talk about orientation to happiness and money which she did via the display of non-materialistic characteristics and dispositions.

Other respondents also provided accounts that suggested that the idea of materialism is underpinned by morality. Both Laurence and Eileen, for instance, talked about the past:

**LH: Do you think that people today are happier than in the past?**

Laurence (65, Male): They should be, but they don't seem to be. But I think mainly, it's because they're so... well, we've got very materialistic. They seem to think that will make us happy. You know, must have a third television, must have a second car, must have this, must have that. And if you think about it, you don't really need those things. It's nice to have them, it's nice to want them. But not need them. And I think we've got very... selfish in our attitudes. You know, you might see somebody in the road, might say hello to them if they're not looking very happy. Or even a little smile... I don't mean a very big grin, but just to make them feel a little bit more comfortable. But people just don't do that anymore. And just for that simple reason... Whereas many years ago, we did. Erm... class has also changed, you know, people used to be put into groups of classes which I'm glad is not there anymore. Not so much, anyway. You know, he knows his place, I know my place and everything else. So in a
way that person was content with what they'd got in that class, but we’re not anymore 'cos we've seen what the other side is, so we want it. We don't need it but we've got to have it. Don't know how to use it, but we want it. And I think that's what it is.

LH: Do you think that the idea of happiness has changed over time or over history?

Eileen (63, Female): Oh yes, people are far more materialistic today than they ever were. I mean, I grew up... I won’t say I was underprivileged or anything like that, but... everything now, with children, is I want, I want. So they grow up like that... unless they get it, they’re not happy. And I think it starts from an early age, actually. You know, when I was young, we didn't get all those things. You didn't have a plastic card, you couldn't say I want it, so I'll have it. You just didn't do that. If you had the money, you could have it, buy it outright. Then you can forget about it, you've paid for it. But today, it's not like that at all, is it?

LH: Would you say that people were happy without all those things?

Eileen (63, Female): Oh definitely, yes. There was also a camaraderie, with people... you helped one another then. People are not so ready now, to help one another. You know, there's a lot of jealousy, which is the worst thing. People are quick to run somebody else down, they'd rather be talking about somebody else and running them down. When I was young, you had good mates, you had your best friends and you were happy together. But, there's all this... it's just materialistic, with a lot of people.

Again then, Laurence is situating himself within this 'non-materialistic' discourse; in giving his account, he is displaying the appropriate characteristics and dispositions, and does so by referring to a 'they' (that is, the rest of society) as the 'materialistic other' before expressing his own, different view that material things are not necessary for happiness. His account also suggests that materialism is accorded with little moral value, as he feels that society's increased consumerism is accompanied with an increased level of selfishness. Both of these, for him, have led to communitarian decline in recent years; by comparing this to — perhaps
'better' - times in the past when interaction within communities did exist, and by highlighting the way in which people might desire material goods that are unavailable to them, he produces his self by displaying that he is not part of the 'materialistic other', but instead, associates with a non-materialist identity that is of higher moral value.

Eileen, like Laurence, also situates herself within 'non-materialist' discourse. Again, she identifies a 'materialistic other', and expresses her difference from them by reflecting on the way in which she experienced happiness when she was younger without having a lot of money. Her account also implies that materialism is of little moral value, as she associates it with an increasing amount of jealousy, selfishness and conflict between individuals, as opposed to people being happy within cohesive groups. Like Laurence then, she produces her self in this way by differentiating herself from the 'other', positioning herself as separate from the communal decay that she describes and therefore displaying a more moral, non-material identity.

So why does the use of this 'non-materialist' discourse of happiness accrue so much value and morality in this way? And conversely, why is the idea that material goods bring about happiness seen to lack value and morality? This may appear counterintuitive; within the framework of Bourdieu's symbolic economy, the acquisition of money and material goods would provide economic capital and high exchange-value (Bourdieu, 1986a). Instead, however, his typology has been upturned or reversed; the accounts of these people demonstrate that material possessions, or economic capital, accrues little exchange-value, and it is non-materialistic selves that are accorded value – in the form of cultural capital (which is converted into symbolic capital), or use-value. In other words, people, in situating themselves in a non-materialist discourse by displaying their difference from an inferior
‘materialistic other’, generate a sense of self-worth. They are also expressing a middle class aesthetic (Bourdieu, 1986a) by situating themselves in such a discourse. As highlighted earlier in the chapter, this non-materialist discourse is intimately related to – and can even be considered an aspect of – therapeutic discourse, through its emphasis on refraining from relying on ‘external’ factors for the experience of happiness. Against a backdrop of therapeutic culture, to ‘know oneself’ as a particularly non-materialistic self who looks inward – rather than outward – for their happiness would have great currency (Rimke 2000, Hazleden 2003), and would be accorded value. Thus, it could be said that the accrual of use-value, self-worth and cultural capital for the non-materialistic self is very much channelled and directed by therapeutic culture, as well as the classed aesthetic. Therefore it is therapeutic culture itself that provides access to this cultural discourse (of non-materialism) and practices with which experiences and perceptions of happiness are constructed, and with which selves are produced.

Money, Freedom, Self

Whilst it is clear that ‘materialism’ is considered a barrier to happiness, and that it is non-materialistic selves that are accorded value, many respondents felt that money is important for the experience of happiness in certain aspects of life. Several people spoke about the way in which, despite feeling that money is not important for happiness, having some (that is, enough for basics like food and shelter) is indeed necessary. Alan and Danielle both expressed this:

LH: So you don’t think that we need money and a lot of possessions in order to be happy?

Alan (48, Male): No. No, I wouldn’t say you need a lot of it, I’d say not having it can be tough, having enough to... enough to live on, I mean, why do you need... most people don’t have a
drug habit that I'm aware of, they don't... once you've got a certain amount of money, that you can afford to do... you know, some relatively normal things, or what I consider normal, anyway... going on holiday as a family, or having enough money to occasionally socialise with friends... so things that I find make me happy, I'd say if that's sufficient, then you have enough. I don't need two houses. If I had lots of money, would I buy another house? Well, probably, because I've got to do something with it! Do you know what I mean? It's not necessarily per se going to make me happy.

**LH: Do you think that we need money and a lot of possessions to be happy?**

Danielle (26, Female): I think everyone would want to be seen to be saying that you don't need money to be happy. But I think... you do to an extent, so that you're comfortable enough to be able to live the life that you want to lead. So if you want to go to the cinema and then for a meal out afterwards, that you can, and not worry about the cost of that. But I've not been brought up with a lot of material... possessions, or brand-new cars or anything. So to me, I don't have great expectations of how much money I want to earn so that I can have a 2.5 million pound house and three cars and a swimming pool, because that's just not important to me.

Alan highlights the way in which having some money is important for being happy; he identifies a number of activities that this would enable him to do, which he considers to be 'normal' (which also suggests a normative undercurrent to happiness, where it is considered 'normal' to seek happiness via social means – see Chapter 7 for further discussion of this). However, by then going on to say that he does not need two houses, he situates himself within non-materialist discourse by displaying such preferences and thus producing a self of greater value. Danielle's account is similar to Alan's; she also identifies a number of instances in which money could provide happiness. However, she begins her account by explicitly identifying the way in which a non-materialist stance might be accorded more
moral value by many people. She then goes on to produce her own self in this exact way, by
displaying her own non-materialistic characteristics and positioning herself in this discourse.
Thus, contradictions did arise in the way in which non-materialistic selves were produced,
inasmuch as money may play a more prominent role than perhaps some have suggested.

Further, some respondents highlighted the way in which having a requisite amount of
money brings about happiness inasmuch as it provides the individual with a sense of
freedom:

**LH: Do you feel happy at the moment?**

Beth (23, Female): *Like, right now? I’m quite happy... but I think I’d be happier if I was just
more settled, and had work, and things like that. Only day-to-day. But yeah, I’m happy, got
good friends and family, so... yeah. Well I’m not unhappy! I could be happier... but I’m not
unhappy.*

**LH: OK. What is it about getting a job that you think would make you happier?**

Beth (23, Female): *It’s just freedom, basically, I don’t have any freedom. I’m living in
somebody else’s space, and that’s fine with them, but it’s for me really, I have a problem with
it, more than I think they do. Yeah, just freedom... with money too, and my own space, I’d be
freer. I wouldn’t be so self-conscious all the time. If I had more money, I could do all of the
things I wanted to do... Yeah, just being able to get up and go a bit more than I can now.*

**LH: If you could be given anything to make you feel happy or happier right now, what
would it be?**

Tom (25, Male): *Erm... a good, full-time, reasonably well-paid job! A full-time job would be
good as I’m only part-time at the moment. Yeah, a full-time job preferably in the charity
sector, fundraising. That’s what I want most at the moment. You know, if you said that I’ll
meet a long-term girlfriend next week, then that would be nice, but I’d really like a job! I need*
a job to get the money to be able to do things that I want to do. Like, I live at home, but I want to move out and be independent... I'd like to go travelling for a bit maybe, but I need that full-time job to do that. That's what I really want right now.

Beth, who was unemployed and was lodging temporarily on a friend's couch at the time of the interview, talks about feeling unhappy about the lack of freedom that accompanies her lack of work and money. Despite situating herself in non-materialist discourse at other points during her interview, she did not do so here. She had clearly reflected on this previously and describes feeling self-conscious (this type of self-reflection being a major aspect of therapeutic culture – see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this). Tom, like Beth, also describes his dissatisfaction with his employment circumstances and expresses a desire for more independence and freedom than his current salary allows for; he is thus also not situating himself within non-materialist discourse here.

These accounts thus appear contradictory to those presented hitherto in this chapter. Freedom – as discussed in detail in Chapter 7 - has been shown to be intimately related to the idea of happiness, and the two are very much associated in people's accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness. Indeed, freedom is often considered to be a condition of happiness (see Chapter 7 for further discussion); it is also a fundamental aspect of therapeutic culture. Thus, essentially, these accounts are suggesting that some money is necessary for being happy. Why is money considered to be important for freedom (and thus happiness), when non-materialist discourse also plays such a prominent role in accounts of happiness? Freedom and non-materialism are clearly both important aspects of therapeutic culture, but surely these are contradictory if money is seen to be necessary for freedom?
Whilst money is considered important for freedom and happiness, these accounts are not suggesting that a lot of money is necessary. An overwhelmingly dominant discourse amongst all respondents was that of 'enough' money being a necessity for happiness, but that of 'too much' being problematic. That is to say that after accounting for the necessity of a small amount of money, non-materialist selves are still accorded moral value in people's accounts of happiness. People nevertheless produce their selves in relation to this 'materialistic other' that is characterised by the want of material goods beyond that which is considered 'normal', and beyond that of freedom, basic subsistence and comfort. Thus, people continue to replay normative, non-materialist discourses whilst simultaneously expressing a desire to accrue more wealth.

(Non-) Materialist Self-Production

Thus, many people, in reflecting upon the relationship between money and happiness, express the idea that money and consumption are not important for a happy life; in other words, they produce 'non-materialistic' selves. The concept of such a self rests on the widespread belief that one ought not to depend upon 'external' sources for their happiness, but instead, should draw it from 'within', via technologies of, or 'work' upon the self; the production of this kind of self is thus a form of self-knowledge. It is in this way then, that this self-production is intimately interwoven with, and an aspect of, therapeutic culture. 'Non-materialistic' selves are thus accorded more moral value than 'materialistic' selves, who would – against the fundamental precepts of therapeutic culture – draw happiness from 'outside' the self; indeed, it is via the process of 'work' on the self that non-materialistic selves accrue value. Therefore it is evident here that therapeutic culture is having a direct impact upon people's accounts of their perceptions of happiness and money in this way. However, class also has a direct impact here: whilst therapeutic culture is an important
aspect of this self-production, it is also an expression of a middle class aesthetic, whereby selves are produced via discourses of difference from other, more 'tasteless', 'excessive' selves.

So in this analysis, materialism is not a 'real' concept as such; that is, there is no absolute 'materialism metric' against which it can be measured. Rather, it is a construct upon which people draw when making sense of their experiences and perceptions of happiness and money, as well as producing their selves in this particular way. They do this first, in displaying non-materialistic characteristics and dispositions, second, when positioning themselves in discourses around difference from a 'materialistic other' and third, when drawing upon discourses around the importance of having 'enough' money for the attainment of comfort and freedom.

The assertion from economists that money and one's financial situation are major determinants of happiness is therefore shown to be applicable; however, the above analysis shows that the relationship between the two is far from straightforward. The production of the self, when considered in relation to such a framework, is complex; people express a need or want for a requisite amount of money, but do so whilst continuing to position themselves within this normative non-materialist discourse. The 'work' on the self that is performed in doing so enables such selves to accrue value. Therapeutic culture – as well as the classed aesthetic - frame both this accrual of value to, and the production of non-materialist selves; it is both of these that provide access to the discourses and dispositions with which experiences and perceptions of happiness are constructed.

**Fulfilling Employment**
‘Working life’ was another of Richard Layard’s ‘Big Seven’ causes of happiness; indeed, many people talked about the way in which their working life is of high importance for being happy. In particular, it is feelings of fulfilment and achievement that contribute to their happiness, rather than any monetary or financial gains that their work may bring. In a Marxist sense, it is a relationship with one’s ‘species being’ and sense of identity that is important for happiness, as well as a sense of one’s work being more than simply a means of survival (Marx and Engels, 1988). This resonates with their orientations to money that were highlighted in the preceding section: rather than money per se being a source of happiness, it is the intrinsic enjoyment of work that is important, as well as the way in which the work process may modify and strengthen one’s sense of self.

There is thus a therapeutic cultural ideal toward which people seem to be aspiring, whereby the relationship between one’s experience of happiness and their working lives is underpinned by feelings of achievement and self-fulfilment; in other words, it is not money that is considered to bring about happiness, but an internal sense of heightened self-knowledge. Although not everyone actually achieves this feeling of fulfilment, but instead feels a sense of alienation from their work (as will be demonstrated later in this section), many nevertheless express a desire for or an aspiration towards it.

As well as being a therapeutic cultural ideal, it is also a middle class ideal whereby – for the middle classes at least - a shift has occurred from the commodity fetishism, or the objectification of money, acknowledged by Karl Marx (1867/1999), to a concern with a more intrinsic, self-orientated evaluation of the work process. Again, as explored in the previous section, this intrinsic evaluation of work is bound up with the middle-class aesthetic and the production of middle class, ‘tasteful’ selves; people do not express any desire for money and
consumption because this is intimately linked with working-class excess and lack of taste, which, according to Bourdieu (1986a), in his critical analysis of Kant’s ‘Critique of Judgement’, is lacking in moral worth.

Indeed, Mark talked about the happiness and fulfilment that he has experienced through his work, despite the fact that he is ‘paid peanuts’:

Mark (41, Male): I have a nice flat, and a great job that I love, I work for a charity, I get paid peanuts, but I’m lucky in the respect, as I said, with my job that I wake up on a Monday morning and think ‘yeah, it’s Monday!’, in fact, at the times when I’m unhappy, certainly over the last few months, and looking back, they’ve been periods of time when I haven’t been working. Or even a weekend off, it’s like sometimes I won’t leave the settee on a weekend off and feel really miserable, but then going to work on Monday makes me feel happy, ‘cos I’m doing things and getting a buzz out of my work and stuff.

Mark expresses his feelings toward his work by positioning himself in another discourse of difference; he describes himself as ‘lucky’ to have a fulfilling job, which suggests that he considers himself to be unusual in this respect. He thus positions himself as something different to the norm. Again, this is a classed position; by emphasising that he is satisfied despite the fact that he is paid ‘peanuts’, he produces his middle-class self by distancing himself from any reliance upon wealth for his happiness. As discussed in the preceding section, a need and a want for money and consumption is associated – in relation to Bourdieu’s critique of Kantian aesthetics - with a ‘tasteless’, working class, facile aesthetic that is seen to lack any moral value (Bourdieu, 1986a). Further, work could also, for Mark, facilitate his utilisation of a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988); going to work after a
‘weekend off’ is a resource that he draws upon to work on himself and maximise his happiness (which he is unable to do when at home on his settee).

Alan, when asked about the happiest person he knows, emphasised an acquaintance’s fulfilment at work, which he considered to be the central factor to his happiness:

**LH: Who is the happiest person you know, and why?**

Alan (48, Male): [pauses] I think I know a couple of blokes who are really quite happy. They're very successful in their careers, extremely successful. Erm, so they have an awful lot of — within their industry — fame and influence... and one of them is extremely well financially rewarded. But I don't think that's what makes him happy, I think it's this fact that they get this... high level of achievement, satisfaction in what they do. And I think that's made them quite happy.

Like Mark, Alan also replays a normative, classed discourse; whilst he acknowledges that income could be a source of happiness, he infers that the source of his acquaintance’s happiness is more likely to be intrinsic job satisfaction than the money that he earns. Again, he may have said this because an association between large amounts of money and happiness is considered excessive, ‘tasteless’ and lacking in middle-class aesthetic (Bourdieu, 1986a), and thus accorded with less value.

Lastly, Lizzie described her happiness with her working life:

Lizzie (25, Female): I think my career is going really well for me at the moment. About six months ago I was in a secretarial role for the Director of Communications at [government department] and when he got promoted, I had the opportunity to move, to get rid of the
secretarial role, and start at the bottom of press and marketing which is an area that I really want to get into. So I'm kind of in the process at the moment of... even though I get called a press and marketing officer, I'm a little bit below that role, but I'm being trained up by people that I really respect a lot, and have good relationships with all my colleagues... they're kind of training me up at the moment and they're really helping me and mentoring me and kind of showing me the ropes for the things that I need to do to be able to get up to the next level in my career. So even though I'm not quite there yet, I'm at a stage of my life where I finally know what I want to do... for the moment, and I'm achieving it at the moment.

Again, for Lizzie, work facilitates her use of a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988); although she did not feel fulfilled in her previous role as a secretary, her promotion allowed her to strengthen her understanding of her path in life, which made her feel happy. Furthermore, this understanding is a form of self-knowledge, and it thus allowed her to strengthen her relationship with her self and her identity. It is in this way that she situates herself within therapeutic discourse. In addition to this, Lizzie's account is also – implicitly - reflective of a middle-class aesthetic; she emphasises the sense of achievement that she gets from her work, but does not – at any point – attribute any of her happiness to the money that she earns. By drawing attention specifically to the happiness that she experiences from the intrinsic aspects of her job, she produces a specifically middle-class self, for whom an excessive amount of wealth is of low importance.

Thus, the three extracts presented above all show the way in which people produce their selves via their relation to the middle-class aesthetic (Bourdieu 1986a, Lawler 2005). In other words, people in each of these accounts have positioned themselves as distinct or separate from an identity for which large amounts of money and 'excess' (which may, for them, be seen to represent working-class 'tastelessness') are associated with happiness. Instead, they
produce their middle-class selves by identifying with an aspiration for intrinsic fulfilment and satisfaction from work and economic life.

However, they have all done so within a therapeutic cultural framework; for some, work enables people to draw upon a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988) via which they are able to maximise their self-knowledge and strengthen their relationships with their selves. Ideally, they would be autonomous, choosing individuals who have a capacity to seek and gain fulfilment in order to heighten such self-knowledge (Rose 1996, Giddens 1991, Beck 1992). One can thus see that it is therapeutic discourse that people are using when articulating their experiences of happiness and work. However, it may not always be as straightforward as this.

Fulfilling work may be an ideal that many people highlight in their accounts of happiness; indeed, as shown above, this illustrates the centrality of therapeutic culture to such accounts. However, it is not necessarily accessible to all; that is, not everyone is granted the capacity to be able to gain such intrinsic fulfilment. Some respondents highlight examples where they have not been able to heighten their self-knowledge in this way. Tom, for instance, expresses unhappiness at the lack of freedom and independence that his work brings about:

*LH*: If you could be given anything to make you feel happy or happier right now, what would it be?

Tom (25, Male): Erm... a good, full-time, reasonably well-paid job! A full-time job would be good as I'm only part-time at the moment. Yeah, a full-time job preferably in the charity sector, fundraising... where I can get a sense of achievement that I'm doing an interesting job. That's what I want most at the moment. You know, if you said that I'll meet a long-term
girlfriend next week, then that would be nice, but I'd really like a job! I need a job to get the
money to be able to do things that I want to do. Like, I live at home, but I want to move out
and be independent... I'd like to travel a bit maybe, but I need that full-time job to do that.
That's what I really want right now.

Tom talks about the way in which his employment situation has denied him access to the
therapeutic cultural ideals of autonomy and choice. Although he acknowledges a desire for
freedom and fulfilment (which he feels that he could get if he had a full-time job), his
account suggests that he is not an autonomous individual who is able to work on himself and
heighten his self-knowledge. This raises the question of whether there may be flaws in some
of the 'therapeutic turn' literature: the self, rather than being completely autonomous and
free to work on him or herself in order to become a 'better' person, is actually constrained
by its social position; that is, different selves have differential access (according to their
position) to the resources and practices with which to work on their selves (Skeggs 2004,
Savage 2000). Indeed, Tom's situation and social position do not allow him access to such
resources and practices, although he acknowledges a desire for this.

Martin also talks about his feelings toward his recent lack of success:

Martin (32, Male): I wonder what would make me happier at the moment... it's difficult to
say. If you'd asked me three years ago, the way things were going, I was close to becoming a
banker, I was interviewing with [Bank Y]... I'm happy having the job I have at the moment,
and I don't think I have the strength to be working harder, I mean I work a nine to five job, I
get paid well, I don't think I'd have the energy at the moment to go back to [Bank X], it would
just run me into the ground. But at the same time, the fact that I don't feel that I have the
energy anymore... and maybe it's because of my age... it kind of erodes my happiness as well.
'Cos at one point I thought I was going to be a really successful... after graduating I got a job, then I got a better job, then I got another better job, and before I knew it people were offering me one hundred thousand pound base salaries with fifty per cent guaranteed bonuses. So I felt close to becoming a very successful person. Then in the last year that kind of all got knocked away, and now I'm basically back to where I was three or four years ago, when I got my first job... I'm fine with that, it's the middle of a recession... But at the time it disaffected my confidence... [...] But I'm wise enough to know that that applies for a lot of people... I know shitloads of guys who have lost their jobs, but I would have probably hoped that I would have achieved a bit more by now, or at least that I would have had less setbacks in terms of things that have happened in the last year that I feel have undermined me...

Martin, like Tom, acknowledges a desire and aspiration for fulfilment and achievement in his working life. This is especially evident in his admission that ‘I would have probably hoped that I would have achieved a bit more by now’, which suggests that he has previously undertaken extensive reflection on what kind of self he is and would like to be. Indeed, he talks about times in the past when he did experience this, and does so in a self-orientated, therapeutic fashion; rather than describing these experiences simply as events, Martin’s account suggests that work for him is something that he sees to be central to his identity and to his cultivation of a ‘healthy’ and positive relationship with his self (Hazleden, 2003), inasmuch as he had a high regard for himself and felt like a ‘very successful person’. His perceived current decline in status impacted on his confidence. Thus, he has situated himself within therapeutic discourse in talking about his experiences of happiness in his working life.

Again, however, Martin described feeling unhappy and lacking in confidence about having experienced diminished fulfilment from his work in recent years. He identified a number of factors, in particular his age, that may have contributed to this. His accounts thus suggests
that, like Tom, his social position is restricting his access to the resources and practices — within his working life at least — with which he can be the autonomous, fulfilled individual that he aspires to be, and which therapeutic culture advocates (Skeggs 2004, Savage 2000)

Sophie describes the unhappiness that she experiences in relation to her work as a receptionist for a large pensions company, and explains why she would like another job:

**LH: You said earlier that you’d like a career change — why is that?**

Sophie (22, Female): *Because... I want to broaden my mind... I also want to feel a part of something, you know. Like, at the moment, I don’t feel a buzz from work... Imagine that you work as a journalist or something, and you get a real buzz — I don’t have that. I’d just like to do something varied, that’s not the same every day, where I’m not bottom of the pile. And my team, the admin team... we’re like the shit team, we get the shit jobs... And they’re so boring, like booking meeting rooms... it’s not something that anyone ever says ‘well done’ for, I never get any thanks, I never feel like anyone appreciates what I do, you know. And I think all the partners probably think I have nothing going for me... that I’m stupid. The girls on my team all seem to be really dissatisfied as well, and none of them have any drive or creativity. Like, we all have to wear these matching suits, you know, and I really don’t feel like an individual because of that, I can’t express who I am. To be honest, I’m really dreading going into work tomorrow...*

Sophie, like Tom and Martin, also expressed an aspiration for fulfilment at work; she talked about wanting a career change to something more fulfilling than her current job, which does not allow her to experience or to even seek fulfilment. She expresses further frustration at the impression she has that the partners in her company *perceive* her as having no ambition for any achievement. That is to say, one source of her unhappiness at work is the identity that her superiors have assigned to her (which is an unintelligent, unambitious individual).
Whilst in this account, she expresses a middle class aesthetic, by highlighting a desire for fulfilment and by distancing herself from any claims of the monetary benefits of work, she may fear that it is the very outlook (or the tasteless, working class, facile aesthetic (Bourdieu, 1986a)) that she is positioning herself as distinct from that is that which her colleagues (mis)assign to her. Further, she even goes as far as expressing disgust (Lawler, 2005) toward the low-status administration team of which she is a part (‘we’re like the shit team, we get the shit jobs’); although she is very much a member of the team, she also disassociates herself from it by describing her team-mates as lacking in ‘drive or creativity’ whilst simultaneously highlighting her own drive to seek a new job in which she could use some of her own creativity. Thus, whilst the rest of her team may – for Sophie at least – seem to only express a facile aesthetic, and are dissatisfied in their jobs, Sophie herself expresses her unhappiness by distancing herself from this type of outlook, and instead, expresses a middle class aesthetic by stating that she would like to seek further fulfilment and satisfaction in her working life, rather than choosing to stay in her job because it provides a steady income.

Despite the fact that Sophie lacks access to the resources and practices with which to gain fulfilment and self-knowledge through her work, she also positions herself within therapeutic discourse in her account. This is particularly evident inasmuch as she would like to be able to work on herself in order to experience job satisfaction. One aspect of her work that she is unhappy with is the suit uniform that she and her team are made to wear; she is unhappy about the fact that wearing the suit prevents her from feeling like an individual and expressing herself. Not only is she alienated from her sense of identity, self or ‘species-being’ in this way (Marx & Engels, 1988), but she is also, again, denied access to resources and practices with which to work on herself and heighten her self-knowledge. She nevertheless acknowledges that this is an ideal that she aspires toward in her working life. For Sophie,
being happy is intimately linked with feeling like 'an individual', self-expression and a strengthened relationship with her self (Hazleden, 2003).

Thus, Sophie, Martin and Tom are all in problematic positions whereby they possess a desire for fulfilling, satisfying work (rather than simply a job that pays well), but simultaneously lack access to the resources and practices with which to achieve this fulfilment (and gain any heightened self-knowledge that may accompany it).

So it is evident that therapeutic discourse is used by people in their accounts of happiness and their working lives. This is particularly the case with regard to their accounts of fulfilment; for people who do experience this, their work can be considered a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988), in that the work process enables them to achieve, work on themselves and heighten their self-knowledge. However, whilst a large number of people aspire for such fulfilment, access to it is not available to all; for some, their social position prevents them from accessing the resources and practices with which it can be sought and experienced.

People's accounts of such experiences of fulfilment have also been shown to be classed. This is the case in two ways; firstly, people have differential access to the resources and practices that enable them to experience fulfilment according to their class position (Skeggs 2004, Savage 2000) (though this is not always limited to class, as we have seen: this can also be the case with regard to gender, age race and sexuality). Secondly, discourses of fulfilment from work more generally are inextricably bound up with the middle class aesthetic; by positioning oneself in such a discourse, one is also positioning themselves as separate or distinct from an identity which associates money and wealth with happiness, and which may
be perceived as excessive, 'tasteless' and associated with the working class's facile aesthetic (Bourdieu, 1986a). It is in giving these kinds of accounts then, that people produce their (middle) classed selves.

Although these accounts are bound up with both therapeutic culture and the middle class aesthetic, therapeutic culture may not necessarily be a purely middle class cultural phenomenon. Perceiving experiences of happiness as internal and restricted to that of the individual, and seeking to know more about oneself in order to improve one's relationship with their self may all be subjective processes that are found amongst people in a variety of social positions, whether or not they have access to the resources with which they can do so. However, particular accounts and discourses pertaining to money, wealth, fulfilment and happiness may be utilised more by the middle classes. This study is also particularly well-placed – with regard to the interview sample - to illustrate the way in which middle class people's experiences and perceptions of happiness are affected by therapeutic culture.

Conclusion

People's working lives and financial situations are, as Layard and other economists have identified, central to their experiences and perceptions of happiness. However, as has been demonstrated in this chapter, but what has remained unacknowledged by proponents of the economics of happiness is that discourses are used by people in producing their accounts of these; this is done with particular use of therapeutic discourse and a middle class aesthetic.

People thus use therapeutic discourse in constructing their accounts of happiness, money and working life. In terms of orientations to money, people's assertions that money should not be a source of happiness rest upon the wider therapeutic precept whereby happiness
ought to be experienced as something individual, internal and natural. Thus, according to this precept, happiness should not be sought from any sources external to the individual (such as money). Similarly, people’s accounts of happiness and their working lives largely centre around the ideas of fulfilment and achievement, rather than the money they earn per se. The accounts of the fulfilment and achievement that are experienced by respondents (or in some cases, that are not experienced but aspired for) suggest that for many, work facilitates the utilisation of a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988) whereby people use their experiences at work to ‘work’ on themselves and seek happiness and self-actualisation. Whilst this fulfilment is not achieved by all, it is something that many expressed a desire for (and indeed, lack of fulfilment was often expressed as unhappiness). So, whilst much of the ‘therapeutic turn’ literature assumes that everyone is able to be an autonomous, choosing individual who can draw upon technologies with which to heighten their self-knowledge, access to the resources and practices with which this can be achieved is not necessarily available to all, and many people are unable to draw happiness from their working lives. Nevertheless, a desire and aspiration for a gain of self-knowledge via one’s working life is something expressed by the majority of respondents.

However, class has also played a role in the production of people’s accounts of happiness here. In particular, people often expressed the middle class aesthetic which Bourdieu (1986a) highlights in his critique of Kant’s Critique of Judgement. With regard to their perceptions of money and happiness, the expression of the widespread view that very large amounts of money and wealth may be a hindrance to happiness is one way in which people positioned themselves as distinct or different from an ‘other’ who may choose to spend money on expensive consumer goods, and who may be considered ‘tasteless’ and ‘excessive’. Similarly, they placed emphasis on feelings of fulfilment and achievement in
their accounts of happiness and their working lives in order to distance themselves from the ‘tasteless, excessive other’ which may prioritise money and salary over more intrinsic satisfaction. So by positioning themselves within discourses of fulfilment in this way, they produce such middle class, ‘tasteful’ identities. It is in this way that people produce their – middle class – selves in these accounts of happiness, via the expression of a classed aesthetic, within a framework of therapeutic culture. Thus, whilst Layard’s suggestion that financial circumstances and working life are central to people’s happiness is clearly applicable to the data presented in this chapter, it can also be shown that the use of discourse in the production of accounts surrounding this is fundamental to an understanding of happiness in this way.
Chapter 9
Discussion and Conclusion

The way in which people produce their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness is surrounded by a number of complexities, as this thesis has shown. They do so via the use of a number of dominant discourses, and it is by doing so that a shared cultural sense of what happiness 'is' is created. That is to say, people’s accounts of happiness are not simply indicative or reflective of private, individual thoughts, but rather, they are constructed and articulated via culturally specific ways of being and thinking.

The thesis has also demonstrated that all of Richard Layard’s ‘Big Seven’ causes of happiness (2005:63) are both highly relevant and central to people’s experiences of happiness; indeed, all respondents acknowledged them in their accounts, often without being prompted or asked. However, what the thesis has also indicated is that these determinants are not necessarily discrete categories that can bring about feelings or experiences of happiness in a singular way. Rather, they should be considered as interlinked and interrelated whereby together they make up a complex framework within which the experience and perception of happiness is located. A further layer of complexity is added when happiness is explored through the lens of dominant cultural discourse that this thesis adopts; in producing accounts of happiness through discourse in this way, linkages and tensions between different determinants emerge, rendering the experience of happiness a multi-faceted one. It is, therefore, not as linear and straightforward as Layard suggests.

The final chapter of this thesis revisits its research questions, and sets out a discussion of its overall findings in relation to these; it also highlights the ways in which this study contributes to knowledge in the field, in particular, the existing bodies of literature on happiness, both in
sociology and across the rest of the social sciences and on related areas such as the therapeutic turn and the self and identity. It will also consider the implications of the study's findings for social and public policy and for academic thought more generally.

**Research questions and findings of the thesis**

The research questions of the thesis were: How do people use discourse in producing their accounts of their experiences and perceptions of happiness in contemporary Britain? And how can some of the assumptions that underpin social scientific work on the measurement of happiness be interrogated through such an understanding of the use of discourse? These were addressed throughout the thesis.

The respondents who were interviewed were all asked about what they felt that happiness 'is', and all positioned themselves within dominant discourses when producing accounts in response to this question. Indeed, multiple discourses were often drawn upon simultaneously by respondents. Some discourses were used, in which happiness was constituted as *asocial*, that is, immune and resistant to social factors. One was a discourse of elusiveness, whereby happiness, like with love, was described as being "knowable only intuitively, at the level of feeling." (Jackson, 1999:100). It was also made sense of as something for which there is no straightforward, clear-cut way in which it can be defined. Many people also situated themselves within discourses of naturalness and biology; that is, happiness was seen to come from within the body. It was in this way that the body was seen to be a kind of 'container' for happiness (Lupton, 1998). Happiness was therefore reified through this discourse, as something that is tangible, real and existing within the body. This discourse also gives rise to the idea that that it is one's own personal *responsibility* to change their life and to find a solution to problems, and that *dependency* on sources external to
oneself is undesirable. This was expressed particularly with regard to psychiatric medication such as anti-depressants; an overall tenet of this discourse was that people who are not happy should be capable of regaining their happiness ‘naturally’ rather than artificially’, via medication. The idea that happiness is ‘natural’ was also expressed in relation to its presence across time and space. Whilst a number of social changes and processes that have taken place in contemporary Western society were identified, such as increased consumerism and a growing emphasis on the importance of body image, that have impacted upon what might make us happy, some respondents felt that the actual experience of happiness would withstand such changes, as it is ‘natural’ and ‘internal’. A discourse of uniqueness was also widely used by respondents, whereby happiness is conceived as something that each individual would experience differently. It was described as being manifested through one’s personality and is understood to play a key role in the way in which one constructs and reconstructs their personal identity.

As well as being constituted as asocial, other discourses were used in producing accounts of what happiness ‘is’ that were characterised by the locating of happiness within a complex normative framework in which there exists cultural guidelines on the way in which happiness ought to be displayed and experienced. Many people situated themselves within the discourse of positive thinking, a discourse whose roots are in self-help literature. The fundamental tenet of it is that happiness is something that should be universally striven for in life, and that people should attempt to be happy even in adverse circumstances. Simultaneously, however, a large number of respondents used the discourse of transience, which is based upon the idea that negative or unpleasant experiences are an inevitable part of life, and therefore one cannot and should not expect to be happy at all times. Furthermore, periodic feelings of unhappiness or misery are often beneficial, in order that
experiences of happiness can be fully appreciated. Therefore, whilst it might be deemed as 'undesirable' to be persistently depressed (as this would run counter to the positive thinking discourse), positioning oneself within this discourse of transience would also suggest an undesirability of persistent happiness. It is in this way that these two discourses render the display and experience of happiness subject to negotiation and 'balance' of these guidelines.

In addition to the discourses that were used when producing accounts of what happiness 'is', another discourse, that of the therapeutic, was one of the most dominant in relation to the production of accounts of experiences of happiness. In positioning themselves within therapeutic discourse, people understood their experiences of happiness as being individualised, internal and self-orientated. Many of the precepts of this discourse have their roots in the self-help and therapy industries. In particular, the self is considered as having a relation to itself; that is, it is considered to be 'ontologically separate' from the individual (Hazleden, 2003:416). It is also the primary site on which individuals are able to 'work', and on which they can perform techniques or technologies in order to change or improve their sense of selfhood in some way or to increase their self-knowledge (Foucault, 1988). Central to the therapeutic discourse of happiness is the idea that self-care and self-knowledge are fundamental to being happy. Happiness is seen to be most easily achieved though the cultivation of a "healthy relationship with the self" (Hazleden, 2003:421). Although therapeutic discourse is a quintessentially modern way of making sense of the self and of happiness (Illouz, 2007), it is, like some of the discourses used in order to produce accounts of what happiness 'is', inherently asocial. In part, this is because it is often drawn upon in tandem with the discourses of naturalness and biology; that is, happiness is seen to be 'contained' within the self or the body (see Lupton, 1998), and is considered to be a 'resource' upon which the individual can 'work', by utilising technologies or techniques of
the self (see Foucault, 1988), whenever necessary. Furthermore, the individual is seen to be self-sufficient in this way; with self-sufficiency being a key aspect of self-help literature, one is regarded as being able to ‘work’ on their happiness without any assistance from other people or from any external bodies.

Despite the dominance and overwhelming use of such an asocial discourse in producing accounts of experiences of happiness, interpersonal relationships were nevertheless considered to be important factors for a happy life. Indeed, family relationships and community and friends were put forward by economists (such as Richard Layard (2005)) as being two of the biggest ‘causes’ of happiness. However, these economists have not acknowledged the everyday experiences of happiness; Chapter 7 demonstrated the way in which the discourses discussed above were used by people in order to produce accounts of the specific ways in which happiness is experienced in relation to interpersonal relationships.

A tension became apparent with regard to people’s accounts of their happiness and interpersonal relationships, whereby they were produced whilst positioned within therapeutic discourse; that is to say, that although other people were important in the respondents’ experiences of happiness, they articulated this via an inherently self-orientated narrative. People’s accounts of the happiness that they experienced in relation to being in love and to sexual relationships were also largely asocial (with the exception of one respondent, whose conception of having a partner is intimately bound up with sociality and modern social fragmentation). Although these experiences, crucially, concerned another person, or other people, some respondents described being in love as ‘more than just happiness’, that is, as being a kind of ‘disreality’ (Barthes, 1978), disconnected from the wider social world. Sexual relationships, too, were described using a discourse of naturalness, as they were considered to be related to the satisfaction of a ‘natural’ and
'innate' drive. Conversely, however, the discourse surrounding the desirability of sex within an established, loving relationship, over 'casual' sex that takes place outside of such a relationship was more social; people who position themselves within this may do so in order to conform to a normative expectation to be 'respectable' and to an image of legitimate heterosexuality (Skeggs, 1997). Nevertheless, such a tension between social and asocial discourses appears to exist in relation to experiences of happiness and interpersonal relationships. This may be because the central self-orientated precepts of therapeutic culture serve to obscure the aspects of human existence that are interdependent, intersubjective and social (Rimke, 2000). What is important to note here, is that the intermeshing of different discourses in this way means that the role that interpersonal relationships may play in the experience of happiness cannot be as linear or as straightforward as economists postulate. Though other people may indeed be considered to be a key ingredient for a happy life, experiences of them are still likely to be interpreted and articulated via a - partly asocial - framework of biology, naturalness and self-sufficiency.

Financial situation and working life, another of the two biggest 'causes' of happiness outlined by economists, were also described by respondents as very important for a happy life. However, as with interpersonal relationships, people situated themselves within specific dominant discourses in relation to these, and they therefore produce specific accounts of their happiness in relation to them. Again, respondents were shown to draw heavily on therapeutic discourse in their accounts of their working lives, particularly with regard to the pursuit of self-fulfilment. However, it was also demonstrated that therapeutic ideals such as individualisation may compete with other ideas, namely social class. Many respondents were shown, when giving accounts of their perceptions of money and happiness, to express a view that very large amounts of money and wealth may be a hindrance to happiness. They
positioned themselves as distinct or different from an 'other' who may choose to spend money on expensive consumer goods, and who may be considered 'tasteless' and 'excessive'. Similarly, they placed emphasis on feelings of fulfilment and achievement in their accounts of happiness and their working lives in order to distance themselves from the 'tasteless, excessive other' which may prioritise money and salary over more intrinsic satisfaction. So by positioning themselves within discourses of fulfilment in this way, they produce such middle class, 'tasteful' identities via the expression of a classed aesthetic, but nevertheless through a framework of therapeutic discourse. Here, again, financial situation and working life are made sense of and articulated via an individualised, self-orientated narrative, and the role that they may play in the experience of happiness cannot be as linear or as straightforward as economists postulate.

Implications of the research

This research has a number of implications for the advancement of sociological knowledge. One of the most important ones is the way in which the methodological and substantive gap that appears to have emerged in social scientific work on happiness, which I referred to in the Introduction of this thesis, can begin to be bridged. A gap, or divide, has emerged between quantitative work on happiness that seeks to measure it (alongside related concepts such as quality of life and well-being) on a national or cross-national level and more qualitative, culture-orientated work that is more identity and emotion-based and is more concerned with individuals' everyday experiences of happiness. The latter body of work is still emerging; although sociologists are beginning to take more interest in it, little - if anything - has been published on it as yet. Surprisingly, there appears to be few points of convergence and little common ground between the two bodies of work; the former seeks to measure the happiness levels of entire nations or societies via 'global' metrics, and chart
its determinants, whilst either making assumptions about what happiness 'is', or overlooking the issue more widely. The latter, on the other hand, is often more concerned with the meaning and discourses of happiness, its relationship with the self, and its lived experience on an everyday level. Whilst it is important to have an informed knowledge of what it is that makes us happy at the level of the society or nation, this information could be enriched or enhanced if it were reconciled with knowledge of the cultural backdrop against which happiness is articulated and experienced by individuals in their everyday lives. By undertaking an interrogation of some of the key determinants of happiness that economists have put forward within a framework of the discourses that people use to make sense of them, this thesis has sought to bring these two bodies of work closer together.

Another implication of this study is its contribution to existing sociological debates, particularly those concerning the therapeutic 'turn' and the self, and the sociology of emotions. It serves as a contribution to, but also as a critique of, literature on therapeutic culture. Whilst it has demonstrated the overwhelming pervasiveness of therapeutic discourse in people's accounts of happiness, thus lending support to the assertion that modern societies have witnessed a therapeutic 'turn', it must also be borne in mind that this is not necessarily a streamlined process. Other discourses may compete with this one in people's understandings of their selves and of the world around them, such as those of sociality and of social class. Furthermore, some people may lack access to the resources and practices that allow them to be fully self-sufficient and to 'work' on their selves in order to enhance their own self-knowledge. The study could also contribute to debates within the sociology of emotions, by attempting to raise the profile of happiness research within this body of literature. Currently, it is rarely acknowledged as an emotion of study in its own
right by scholars in this subfield; instead, it often features as a more peripheral aspect of studies of emotions more generally.

With regard to public policy implications, steps have already been taken by the current national government, as discussed at the start of the thesis, to ensure that social policy decisions can begin to be informed by happiness research. This being such a recent development, the happiness data (that is, the data collected by the Integrated Household Survey from April 2011 onwards) has yet to be released, and policies informed by them are yet to be formulated. However, despite this, I would like to assert that these data are unlikely to provide the government with a complete picture of the happiness of the United Kingdom. As stated above, although such data may offer an insight into general levels of happiness across the country, they will be unable to capture the happiness of individuals at the level of the everyday. Public policies, as a result, may be insufficiently equipped to target specific areas of people's lives that may be most in need of attention.

The overwhelming utilisation by respondents (and indeed by many others elsewhere and in the media) of therapeutic discourse in producing their accounts of happiness suggests that Richard Layard's proposal to increase the number of mental health professionals and psychotherapists in the United Kingdom (2005) as a solution to low levels of happiness nationwide may be a feasible one. However, what Layard has not acknowledged or investigated is people's views toward the therapy industry; despite situating themselves within therapeutic discourse when offering their accounts, many people I interviewed expressed negative opinions towards it, expressing a preference for more 'natural' means of gaining happiness. In addition, their emphasis placed upon the importance of interpersonal relationships for happiness suggests that other solutions, such as those related to
community activities and volunteering may be more appropriate. Many respondents also expressed that a sense of fulfilment in the workplace is important for a happy life; thus, more well-being at work policies could be implemented as well as development courses and programmes that would enable people to experience some self-actualisation at work.

Final reflections

This thesis has put forward a framework within which happiness can be theorised sociologically. It provides a useful springboard from which the assumptions and tenets that underpin much of the existing social scientific work on the measurement and determinants of happiness can be interrogated. Not only can an understanding of the ways in which discourse is used in people's production of accounts of their happiness in their everyday lives stand as an important complement to that which already exists in the form of national and cross national measures of happiness; it can also seek to bridge the divide that has emerged between these two 'branches' of happiness research in recent years.


Gardner, J. and Oswald, A. (2002). "Is it money or marriage that keeps people alive?" *University of Warwick*, mimeo.


Appendix 1
Pilot Interview Schedule

- What would you say makes you most happy in life?

- What do you think happiness is?

- Do you think that happiness is something that everyone wants to achieve? Or is it different for different people?
  - [If yes, or no] Why do you think this is?

- Do you think that the idea of 'happiness' might have changed over time or over history?

- And do you think the idea of 'happiness' might be different across cultures?

- Do you feel happy at the moment?

- Could you tell me about some 'happy' events that you've experienced over your life?

- Could you tell me about some 'sad' events that you've experienced over your life?

- How did you cope with these events?
# Appendix 2

## Demographic Information for all respondents

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<th>Name</th>
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<th>Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
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<td>Sales</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Alan</td>
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<td>Trainee solicitor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
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<td>Education Welfare Officer</td>
<td>Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Video Assets Specialist</td>
<td>Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

Information Sheet administered to respondents

Information Sheet

Study Title: Happy and you know it? A socio-cultural examination of the construction of happiness and implications for its measurement.

What is the purpose of this study?
To investigate the meaning and significance of happy (and unhappy) events in people's lives.

Who can take part in the study?
Male and female adults aged 18 and upwards.

What will I need to do if I agree to take part?
You will be asked to take part in a tape-recorded, in-depth interview, lasting approximately 1 hour. The focus of the interview will be on feelings of happiness — as well as unhappiness and other emotions — that you have experienced throughout your life, and ways in which you may have dealt with these. The interview would take place at a time at your convenience.

What type of questions will I be asked?
The interviews will be designed to be free flowing and the type of questions asked will to some extent depend on how the interview develops. However, questions will initially be asked about the things that may make you feel happy and about life events that may have brought about feelings of happiness.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
All information you supply, and any collected data are strictly confidential. Your name will not be disclosed, all your data will be coded with a number. The results from this study may be used for publication but all results will be kept strictly anonymous.

Can I withdraw at any time?
You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice, and you do not have to give a reason for your withdrawal. Information from participants who have withdrawn from the study will only be used if this is expressly permitted.

Who has reviewed the study?

268
The University of Surrey Ethics Committee have reviewed this information, and have given a favourable ethical opinion.

Contact for further information:
If you have any questions or require any further information concerning this study please do not hesitate to contact Laura Hyman (Laura.Hyman@surrey.ac.uk, 01483 686977), or her supervisors Dr Jane Fielding (J.Fielding@surrey.ac.uk, 01483 689451) or Dr Paul Johnson (P.Johnson@surrey.ac.uk, 01483 686982).
Appendix 4
Consent Form administered to respondents

<University headed paper>

In-depth Interview Consent Form

Study Title: Happy and you know it? A socio-cultural examination of the construction of happiness and implications for its measurement.

- I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

- I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the investigator of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

- I agree to comply with any instruction given to me during the study and to co-operate fully with the investigator.

- I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice. I understand that if I withdraw from the study my data will only be used if I permit this.

- I understand that the University of Surrey holds insurance which covers claims for injury or deterioration in health which arise directly from participation in research studies but that it applies only in those situations where the University can be shown to be legally liable.

I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions of the study.

Name of volunteer

..................................................
I confirm that I have witnessed the signature of the volunteer named above.

Name of Researcher

(Block Capitals)

Signed

Date
Appendix 5

Interview Schedule for main data collection phase

- What would you say makes you most happy in life?
- What do you think happiness actually is?
- Do you think that happiness is something that everyone wants to achieve? Or is it different for different people? Why do you think this is?
- Do you think that the idea of 'happiness' might have changed over time or over history?
- And do you think the idea of 'happiness' might be different across cultures?
- Do you feel happy at the moment?
- Would you say that happiness is a short-term, fleeting feeling, or a longer-lasting state?
- Who is the happiest person you know, and why?
- If you could be given anything to make you feel happy/happier right now, what would it be?
- A lot of people take anti-depressants or see therapists and counsellors in order to feel happy these days. What do you think of this?
- A lot of people take drugs or drink large quantities of alcohol in order to feel happy these days. What do you think of this?
- Some people think that we need money and a lot of possessions in order to be truly happy. Would you say you agree with this?
- Do you think one needs to have good relationships with friends and family in order to be happy?
- To what extent do you think physical health is important for happiness and emotional well-being?
• Some might say that religion makes people happier – do you think this is true?

• How important do you think being in or falling in love is for feeling happy?

• Have you ever been in love? Did it make you happy? In what way(s)? What feelings did you experience?
  ◦ [If no] Would you like to?

• Do you think that sexual relationships are an important aspect of a happy life? Why? In what ways?